

curtains drawn, sipping Gerolsteiner, and watching reruns of Rick Steves in Italy. What would I do should I actually *be* in Italy? Carry a parasol no doubt.

I love the *idea* of the outdoors, but I want to be indoors. I want there to be an outdoors that I could potentially be in, but I never feel like being in it. Once, Julian and I decided we should get outdoors, fresh air and all that. We drove to some nearby wilderness and attempted a hike. An hour later, defeated, we were back in the car on our way back home. We were afflicted with an odd feeling of malaise (what I like to call *malasia*) for the next week or so – The outdoors made us *ill*. Can one become used to the outdoors? Is it possible to build up an immunity? Strangely enough, cultivated outdoors does not have this affect on me. I'm well enough in gardens, or domesticated forests. I like paths coated in crushed limestone, not muddled rulleets where roots jut up like so many malicious feet conspiring to trip the well-shod. And speaking of well-shod, I own absolutely no outdoors clothing. I've no hiking shoes nor dungarees. I assume that these rustic accessories smooth the way towards wilderness nirvana?

The beach is another matter entirely. I adore the beach. The beach is clean and fresh. There are no deer ticks, ants, mosquitos, or spiders. But the beach is an impossibility because of the sun. I love the air, the sound of the waves, the literary connexions (Gerald and Sara Murphy and their Villa America spring immediately to mind), but it is impossible, or, nearly impossible. If Julian and I lived on the Mediterranean, we would invest in Fellini-esque beach umbrellas, and lounge in a private cove. We'd wear 1920s-styled bathing suits, bring a picnic basket packed with tuna-fish sandwiches, peaches; and San Pellegrino. And yes, we'd lug an industrial-sized vat of 21st-century sunscreen with us as well. One must make some concessions to modernity.

§ **Saturday, May 17, 2003.** On our return from Paris this January, it was very difficult to re-assimilate back into American culture. Our city surroundings were a shock. Everything screamed mediocrity, hypocrisy, or lunacy – I was at odds with everything and everyone. I quickly realized that I had to cope with America, to find things to love about it, or live a VERY unhappy life. It's counterproductive and pathetic to go about bitter, constantly criticizing everything within eye and ear-shot. I'm an American after all, and I guess I belong here; I'm here to stay at any rate. But how to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear? Well, to start with, I made a list of everything that I like about America, and American culture. I feel that by focusing on what I *like* instead of what I *don't like* is the beginning to a happier existence for me. Would you care to take a peek at my All-American favorites?

Poplar trees, The Horrors, abandoned factories, Scott Fitzgerald, *The Shining* (film), picnics, speakeasies, porch swings, diners, Laguna Beach, James Cagney, supper clubs, fried chicken, big bathtubs, old Hollywood, BLTs, Kurt Cobain, 1920s Spanish revival architecture, Jennifer Jason Leigh, hot-dogs with yellow mustard and relish, backyard BBQs, Theodore Drieser, Salem witchcraft, Crispin Hollon Glover, Slint, Henry Miller, Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, Steve Albini, theater organs, "Let's Make a Deal", Edward Gorey, Dorothy Parker, Trent Reznor, farms, Stephen King, chicken fried steak, 1920s beauty contests, Sutro Park in San Francisco, Vincent Gallo, The Manson Family, vintage etiquette books, peanut butter sandwiches, road trips, The Rhythm Boys, 1920s/30s Art Deco, The Haunted Mansion at Disneyland, Tiny Parham, Betty Crocker, Shabby Chic, Swell, cornfields, "I Love Lucy", Woody Allen, flappers, Paul Whiteman, true crime books, The Cramps, Hank Williams, "The Brady Bunch", David Yow and The Jesus Lizard, tornadoes, a sea of wheat, Granddaddy, the great plains, Busby Berkeley, Wham-O., steel

§ **Wednesday, April 16, 2003.** I woke up with an abominable back ache. I can only surmise that I slept in an awkward position, leaving me feeling like I'd been through a accident of the worst degree.

I've gleefully started *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. It is, admittedly, a very difficult read, but well worth the time I'll spend; there are some marvelous ideas and quotes within, e.g. "The naïve exhibitionism of 'conspicuous consumption', which seeks distinction in the crude display of ill-mastered luxury is nothing compared to the unique capacity of the pure gaze, a quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete apart from the common herd."

Arrived home from work at 7pm to find that I'd received a package in the mail from Mother. With my birthday soon to arrive, and knowing that she'd chosen something special this year, I hastened to open it. Alas, it was a shiny new child's silver charm bracelet. I hate to sound ungrateful, I suppose I do, but Mother has a unique talent for buying me neither cheap (which makes things worse), nor appropriate gifts: this charm bracelet is no exception - Its child's size with child's charms. Regretably not something a grown woman would, or could wear. I will, of course, accept it with all due appreciation. Still, it's a damned pity. Julian insists this sort of Mother-Daughter interaction is common, but I wonder if Mother doesn't view me still as a child?

§ **Thursday, April 17, 2003.** Last week I spied an exquisite, antique (early 1920s?), walnut wood desk in the window of Aunt Bill's on Polk St. As we were setting off in the general direction of Aunt Bill's on our way to buy Lulu a new toy mouse, I thought I'd show it off to Julian. The desk, alas, was too expensive for our budget, not to mention too large for our tiny studio, but we did find some reasonably priced, and aptly Baroque hotel silver to round out our set.

Our little tiger Lulu has completely destroyed her tiny toy mouse. All that's left are its innards, forlorn without fur, face, or tail. The replacement mouse, while it has mouse-like features, is gopher-sized. Fashioned after a rat I expect. Our darling "daughter" has graduated from toy mice to toy rats. Next we'll be buying her toy nutrias.

We saw our first nutria in France this past January. It was shambling across the road, oblivious to the danger. We kindly bonked our horn, causing it to scurry quickly away, all the while wondering what this animal could be. A muskrat? An odd variety of French beaver? According to the Potins, who knowingly identified it, the French eat nutria, although in France it's known as *ragondin*. French chef Philippe Parola recommends a good Mèrlot with nutria. "A bottle of Chardonnay or Riesling will go pretty well with a nutria cassoulet." If anyone could fairly accuse the French of *anything* it would be that they are as omnivorous as the Chinese. Nothing goes to waste. As much as I admire and ape the French, I'm sure I'd have to be quite wanting indeed to eat nutria. I've included a recipe here for the more adventuresome, but which wine to decant?

- Heart Healthy "Crock-Pot" Nutria
- 2 hind saddle portions of nutria meat
 - 1 tomato, cut in big wedges
 - 2 carrots, sliced thin
 - 1/2 cup white wine
 - 2 teaspoons chopped garlic
 - 1 cup demi glace (optional)

book recommendations would have differed somewhat, and I don't know that the French women I admire most overlap directly with hers.

I do admire the French, but I can never be French. The book clearly points out that as Americans, we can only be inspired, we can only learn from the French. *Il est impossible d'être une française, non? Mais il est possible d'être moins d'Américaine, n'est-ce pas?*

§ **Thursday, May 15, 2003.** One of the best things about living in San Francisco is the food. I love food. I love good, fresh, just-off-the-farm food, and California is the place for it in the States. Saturday morning there is a farmer's market in San Francisco, much like the ones which sprout forth daily in Paris. The farmers arrive very early in the morning to set up their stalls, and as in Paris, each is an expert in his field kindly offering his knowledge along with his goods, their provenance, history, and preparation techniques. All this to a populace who longs for the authentic in a world of supermarket mediocrity.

Goods from the farmer's market *are* more expensive than that which you might find at the neighborhood grocery store, but after eating *real* produce, real fresh food, it's unquestionably quite shocking to see the stuff that's presented as fruits and vegetables at the supermarket. Yes, it's less expensive, but it has no taste, and truthfully, it looks like what would normally end up on a waste heap. I've often wondered if supermarkets buy lower grade fruits and vegetables purposely as to make the most profit. Would this surprise you? But I'm lecturing aren't I?

What's rotten, is that the San Francisco farmer's market is held only on Saturday mornings, rotten because I've not had Saturday mornings off in several years. But ladies and gentlemen don't distress yourselves, because all is not lost, there is a God, I've been given Saturday mornings off, my work hours at the Salt Mine have been reduced. I believe this is known as a blessing in disguise.

Yes, now I will be able to saunter down the the farmer's market early Saturday morning, basket over my arm, coffee from hateful boutique coffee chain in hand, and Julian at my side, for an eyeful of the best produce the States have to offer: Fresh goat cheese from Martin, lavender and rosemary from Sonoma, dried sausages, French style, from Napa, fingerling potatoes, baby beets, tiny sweet strawberries red through and through, freshly dried flageolet beans, enormous heads of celery the roots still attached. I'll bring my kitchen knives and have them sharpened the Master Sharpener, and munch upon a freshly baked brioche as I wait. Later Julian and I will meet our great friend Jamie Carrow and his friend Nelson (a cook at Chez Panisse), Saturday morning regulars, for an espresso and biscotti in North Beach. How I will appreciate, and relish every moment, of my newfound Saturday mornings.

§ **Friday, May 16, 2003.** The weather is warming up in San Francisco. It's odd, as San Francisco is an "opposite-ville" of sorts, summer being freezing and winter being temperate. Wasn't it Mark Twain who said that the coldest winter he'd ever spent was summer in San Francisco? This year, we're seemingly sticking to the traditional seasons. It's getting warmer.

Most people, with the arrival of warm spring and summer weather, rejoice—Jamie in particular springs to mind. He thrives on hot weather, Spain being his favorite vacation destination (this year, it's southwestern France.) Me, I curse the hot weather. I avoid the sun, but even so, the heat makes my skin turn red, and I'm prone to heat blisters. While *tout le monde* turns out on warm weekends for sailing, hiking, or mountain biking, I'm huddling indoors, thick damask

interior, students at nearby tables discussing conspiracy theories, the books of Philip K. Dick, or the films of David Cronenberg (It's Austin, OK?) There was the Vietnamese lunch counter/Native American jewelry shop (no kidding) near campus, where Julian and I would go to get Vietnamese chicken sandwiches served on French baguettes. The summer days spent at the Hamilton Pool, or Barton Springs, dressed in our old-fashioned bathing suits, a picnic basket lying in wait in a nearby patch of shade. There were the cheap *student parties* where we discussed music, film, literature, and the futility of our chosen field, ate cream cheese and the cheapest caviar served on Wheat Thins, and drank gin martinis whipped up by Dudley.

Austin was so laid back, so relaxed. At the time I was living there I hated it of course. I was young and I craved the kind of sophisticated excitement and novelty that only The Big City can offer. It was hot, and it was crammed with hardest-core fraternity boys and sorority girls you'd *never* want to lay eyes on, but the pace of life was slow – it was languid, voluptuous. The streets were lined with decayed antebellum houses set in large lots thick with acacia hedges and oak trees dripping Spanish moss, the reassuring drone of the cicadas, and the lone, far-away sound of a phonograph playing Ma Rainey, all which conjured up images of Blanche Dubois-type characters lounging in red-lacquered sleeping porches, dressed in faded kimonoes, fanning themselves, whispered lyrics trailing from their bourbon-moistened lips, dreaming of exotic places, trying to muster up the courage and the energy to leave Austin.

And I wanted to leave Austin. And I did following the completion of my Master's program. I thought it would be the happiest day of my life, and at the time it seemed so. Now, after living a decidedly less languid life in San Francisco, constantly assaulted by the fog which blows each evening with seemingly hurricane force (no lengthy terrace-style afternoon discussions here), the constant din of sirens, taxi horns, and bus engines in my ears, I'm ready for a change. I'm ready to return to a life of decayed elegance and cicadas, of torpid afternoons in the shade of an oak tree dripping with Spanish moss, and supine gloomings in a red-lacquered sun-porch listening to Ma Rainey while sipping bourbon – A unequivocally more French way of life and what I long for especially when the seasons change.

§ **Tuesday, May 13, 2003.** I've had bad news this evening: La Parisienne is to close. And I'd just been thinking, today in fact, that I can buy jewelry, my frippery, nowhere but La Parisienne or from the boutiques of Paris itself. I can hear you protesting with a wave of your hand, "Lucie, surely there are other shops in San Francisco which sell jewelry?" Well, yes there are, but I find that only jewelry of a certain, rather baroque, genre will satisfy my whims and cravings. I care for neither gold nor silver. I care not for the boat loads of cheap and common ornament shipped from southeast Asia. I must have, I require, artisan or antique pieces, preferably both, designed and fashioned in Parisian *ateliers*. That La Parisienne is doomed means my *bijoux* supply line from Paris will be cut, forcing me to make do until my next foray to civilization – Oh! the beastliness of it all. Why must everything beautiful in our world perish?

§ **Wednesday, May 14, 2003.** I've just finished reading a perfectly blissful little book, *Entre Nous: a Woman's Guide to Finding Her Inner French Girl* by Debra Olivier. It's not meant to be a scholarly work, there are no tables of statistics nor bibliographical notes to back up her pronouncements on French women, how they think, work, live, love. And yet, I found every word in this book to be utter truth. Debra Olivier has written *my* book. Of course, my film and

0.3. FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2003

1 small onion, sliced thin
2 potatoes, sliced thin
Brussel sprouts
1 cup water
salt and pepper to taste

Layer onion, tomato, potatoes, carrots and Brussel sprouts in crock pot. Season nutria with salt, pepper and garlic to taste and place nutria over vegetables. Add wine and water, set crock pot on low and let cook until meat is tender. Cook for approximately 4 to 6 hours. Garnish with vegetables and demi glace (4 servings).

§ **Friday, April 18, 2003.** I had the most frightful time trying to sleep last night. We turned out the lights at 10:30, but at 3am I was still tossing and turning. Knowing that I'd be in no shape to make it the office by 8:30, I decided to work from home.

Normally when I work from home I keep Turner Classic Movies on for "mood". Between writing code and testing, I can sneak a peek at Busby Berkeley's close-up girls, Bette Davis' snarl, or Joan Blondell's sassy puss. It looked to be Robert Mitchum day, and I must say, I wasn't terribly impressed. While I find his profile to be most enchanting, I'm not sure I care for the films in which he was cast. (The exception is *The Night of the Hunter*, which is stygian, tenebrous, American Gothic in every sense of the meaning.)

Of course, in those days, I don't think film stars had much choice; they did what they were told. I finally rebelled halfway through *Two for the Seesaw* which I found to be contrived, trite, ... why do they keep saying to each other, "Gittle?" "Yes, Jerry?" "I love you, Gittle." "I know you do, Jerry." Leave it to the reviewers at Internet Movie Database to tell it like it is. I wish there were more options for classic film fans. How I'd love to see a channel devoted to classic *foreign* film; to watch nothing but obscure Italian Neorealism or French New Wave films all day long.

Later I intend to indulge myself in a scented bath, open a bottle of Merlot, and curl up with my latest arrived periodicals. How I adore Friday nights. Tomorrow it's back to work, but for now, it is my time.

§ **Saturday, April 19, 2003.** The University isn't nearly so bad when Julian is working as well. We bring CDs (today it was Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma*, and Yes' first album, among others), eat sandwiches, keep the lights low, and laugh a lot as we work bringing old serials records up to snuff. It was a beautiful day, but a pity however to be locked within the dungeon of the library. While the general populace and their dogs were out man-handling the city parks, we were diligently chained to our computers - tap, tap, tap.

What occupation, if any, would I've had, had I lived in 19th century Paris? Tubercular laundress? Anemic violet peddler? Gouty fish mongress? Surely not a lady of leisure, a mistress of the aristocracy, or an artist's model; glamorous, and highly sought after meters all. No, I'm neither beautiful, rich, nor a great wit, prerequisites all for the denizens of the faubourg St-Germain, or the artsy crowd of the *Quartier* Latin.

One wonders why it is that people who purport to have lived "other lives", drew breath as Joan of Arc, Queen Isabella, a harem princess, or a lady in waiting to Marie Antoinette. Surely

they can't all have been part of this privileged crowd. Where are the farmers wives? Servant girls? Work house inhabitants? Me, I feel quite sure I've always been looking "in" from the outside. I've great affinity for luxury, indulgence, and refinement, but have also a curious love for the common man. Men and women like the heroes of *Germinde*, or the characters of Frelø's sad songs, always struggling against adversity, for whom it's almost always a sad and bitter end, who nonetheless seek to better their life situation - I am, after all, a dweller of one of the more squalid neighborhoods of San Francisco, desperately seeking solace and escape any way I can. Have I mentioned that as a child, Andersen's "The Little Matchstick Girl" was my favorite fairy tale?

§ Sunday, April 20, 2003. Again, I'm at work. (Today entertained by the soothing tones of Dominique A. and Yann Tiersen.) Again, in front of man's modern marvel. It seems that when not actually working at this odious contraption, I'm nevertheless labouring over my websites (Even the smallest changes require an enormous amount of time, much of it in frustration.), corresponding with far-flung friends, or taking care of business (balancing of the checkbook, ordering bed clothes, checking airline schedules). All this, in front of the devil's spawn, the computer. If we're not blind by 40, we'll at the very least look not unlike Gollum, pale, puny, hunched, and squinty eyed.

I once worked with a Mexican man, Juan, who said I resembled the transparent fishes of subterranean lakes. He was referring to my pale and vitreous skin, through which you can see blue veins. How much more pellucid might I become? My eyes are already so sensitive to light that I require thick damask curtains at home, and heavily blinded windows at work. I've become the female Gollum, Gollumette, who by the light of day, scurries through the streets seeking the shadiest side, hatted and gloved, terrified of the sun's cancerous and burning rays. "Yasty sun, we hates it." Were it a beautiful day today, which it is not, would I choose to be out in it anyway? Regrettably, no. At least, down in the basement, in the library dungeon, I'm safe, illuminated only by the weak and dissolute rays of monitor screens and fluorescent lights.

§ Monday, April 21, 2003. Have you ever seen a jaundiced man? I did, this morning. My first. He was as yellow as if he'd been given a coat of iodine. It was quite shocking. I had to suppress the desire to urge him to see a doctor. I've always wondered what jaundice looks like, if people *really* turn yellow. I can now vouch that they do. I didn't get close enough to him, to see if his eyes had turned yellow as well. It's strange how visible sickness brings out the "get away from me" instinct in one.

Julian and I have discovered Guy Maddin. What's taken us so long? I suppose you've all known of him for ages. I suppose that Guy is *passé* now? Our favorite film thus far, is the 1992 miracle, *Careful*. As I type, *Tales From the Gink Hotel* plays from the DVD machine. Maddin's narrative track running. How I adore his use of "hiss tracks", old-timey music favorites like *I'm a Dreamer (Aren't We All?)* or *Honeymoon Hotel*, and heavy shadows reminiscent of Fritz Lang films. We've added Guy Maddin to our private pantheon of film making Gods. He's been squeezed between David Lynch and Eric Rohmer.

One of Maddin's films is being shown tomorrow night at the San Francisco Film Festival. Theoretically, I'd love to go, but I loathe the crowds, the pushing and the shoving, the cracking candy wrappers, the sound of endless bucketfuls of popcorn being masturbated mouth open; elements all of the film screening experience. How many nights out we've mixed, tickets bought, reservations

And then, of course, there are the wedding pictures. "Town & Country", devotes umpteen pages to snapshots of "society" weddings culled from gated communities all over America. It's curious that anyone would allow their wedding photograph to be included in "Town & Country" for scrutiny by the "Town & Country" reading hoï polloi. Surely not the "elegant and discerning" hoï polloi? Is getting, rather, *aspiring to get* your picture in the paper a mark of good breeding? My Mother, *gauthe* as it would be to do so, would argue that it is not, as would I.

§ Sunday, May 11, 2003. Yann Tiersen makes me cry. He's the only artist who does this to me. (I cry when I hear Elsie Carlisle sing, "The Clouds Will Soon Roll By", but this doesn't count does it?) It's embarrassing really because anywhere the soundtrack to *Amélie* is playing you may find me in tears, bravely scanning the sales racks, examining the merchandise with a stiff-upper lip, my eyes awash. When alone I give in, sobbing as though I were five, a childish foot having just gone through my birthday cake. In the company of friends I may allow a few tears to trickle down my cheek, after all, I've the artistic temperament, and I *feel* things that *normal* people don't. I ask you, is there any music that makes *you* sob? Is this not the mark of a poetic soul?

I took a bath today, one of my marathon-length soaks, replete with bath salts, bath oils, bath foam, and other paraphernalia of the bath. Near the tub's edge, I put a tiny table where I may set my tea, and on which little Miss Dinah Moppet likes to perch - she's fascinated by the tub you see. I put music on, or if TCM is broadcasting a good movie, I'll just leave it to run, the dialing the inspiration for my relaxation reverie. Our tub is old. 1931 to be exact. It's deep and it's long, a porcelain marvel surrounded by Art Deco-era tiling in pink and blue. I tell you, it would be perfect, but there is no window in our bathroom. Mood lighting must be supplied by scented candles and marble urn lamps; there is no breeze, no play of light on water, no leafy shade thrown by tall chestnuts.

Yann Tiersen played as I took my bath today. It was *L'Absente*, and as the title suggests it's mood is that of absence, of loneliness and heartache, sad and beautiful at once. I cried in the tub, the tears streaming down my face, with my tea and Dinah at my side, my bath accoutrements laid out carefully, but they weren't tears of sadness, rather, tears of recognition, tears erupting from dark places which haven't been stirred, which could be reached by nothing but music. Music which evokes the pain and pleasures of quotidian mortality; the profound anguish and futility of human existence. So sad, yet so beautiful.

§ Monday, May 12, 2003. With the change of season, most notably summer to autumn and spring to summer, I get the itch to go to Paris. I remember as a grad student at University of Texas at Austin, spending long hours in the French library in the Music building, doing my French homework, reading Paris Match, watching the leaves turn from its *Belle Époque* era windows. Leaving the library I'd hear the French profs speaking quietly to each other *en français*, hurrying to their afternoon classes or the sanctity of their offices.

There was something, admittedly a very little something, French about Austin. There was of course, Les Amis, the now defunct coffee shop-cum-slacker hang-out which has since been replaced by a well-known, damnable, coffee *boutique* chain. It was as close to heaven as one could get in Austin, to hang out on its terrace on a warm autumn evening, sipping coffee, the cicadas chirping in a nearby oak tree, Django (or maybe it was the Butthole Surfers?) waiting gently from the dark

left Diggi, and its apparel for the boyishly hippped, and washboard stomached. But the proprietress, Madame G., assured me that Diggi's raiment suited me *parfaitement*, that I was indeed lucky to possess an hour-glass figure. It would be a pity to not have anything there (gesturing towards my bosom), and *triste* to have nothing there (pointing at my posterior.) Julian, whose opinion I always seek in regard to my dress, decisively agreed.

As an American woman, I'd always cursed the very aspects of my body that men crave. I've been brainwashed by fashion magazines, Hollywood film, societal pressure. There's something almost impure about curves; they're sinful, an outward manifestation of that which should remain hidden and private (in the dark preferably.) France of course, has its fashion magazines, is home to the largest catwalk circuses in the world, but the reality of the female ideal is another story, as it is in Italy and Spain. French women know it, use it, embrace it, love it, and feel comfortable being themselves. These clothes I bought were a kind of turning point for me. It would be a pity had I not wandered the right bank that day in January. It would be a shame had I not learned a fundamental, life lesson from Madame G.

§ Friday, May 9, 2003. I've quite lost myself to pondering "Town & Country" magazine. It's a marvel for someone like me who is keenly interested in the structure of society, the effects of advertising, and the evils of marketing. "Town & Country" is described as "America's premier lifestyle magazine for the affluent, an elegant publication that shares and shapes its readers' discerning tastes in fashion, travel, design, beauty, health, and the arts and antiques. Sumptuous photography and fine writing grace its pages each month. Founded in 1846, it has the distinction of being America's oldest continuously published general-interest magazine. During its 150-plus years, the magazine has chronicled the achievements of many of the country's most famous figures, becoming an American institution itself." What a mouthful. and do pay attention to the myriad fancy buzz words: *premier, affluent, elegant, discerning, sumptuous, fine, distinction, oldest, achievements, famous, American institution.*

If you've never had a look at "Town & Country", I suggest that you do. It peddles "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" fantasies and unattainable dreams of luxury to middle-class women who've social aspirations. I dare say that it's a vehicle for creating feelings of vague unhappiness and subconscious discontent for most of its readers. While "Town & Country" would like you to believe that their clientele is composed of "the affluent", the few in our country who actually *are* rich, wouldn't be substantial enough in number to float their boat. So who falls for this stuff?

Packed with advertisements for diamond-encrusted jewelry (It appears that it's "in" for everything to be coated in tiny diamonds, pavé I believe is the word.), exclusive gated communities, "Destined to be a *family legacy*", cruise lines, "Where will you be taking your cruise *this year*?", and perfume, "The most *expensive* perfume in the world." I can't decide whether to snigger or snort derisively when it comes to "Town & Country", but ultimately it is the copy, and the little ads at the back which convince me that this rag is rooking their readership; it's a magazine for those who can only wish they were affluent, or who like to pretend that they are. Are articles on house-cleaning techniques (do the affluent clean their own houses I'd like to know?), middle-brow icons of decorum like Jacqueline Onassis, and beginner's guides to wine, antique, cigar appreciation (you know, all that classy stuff that wealthy people like) for the affluent? What about advertisements for weight-loss camps for teens (are the affluent as fat as the rest of us?), noble titles, "Purchase an authentic noble title.", and etiquette schools? Don't tell me the rich need etiquette schooling?

made, for a quiet evening at home - Scandalous. Assuredly, I would brave any shrieking horde for a showing of *Footlight Parade* at the Stanford Cinema, or a Yann Tiersen concert at the Greek Theatre.

§ Tuesday, April 22, 2003. We switched the television set on today to find *Time Regained* in progress on the Sundance channel. Wishing to view it from the beginning, I turned it off, but not before spying the tart, Rachel, throw herself languidly onto a velvet divan and proclaim, "Oh, strawberries & aether. It's like kissing snow." What a wanton spectacle. Have you ever in your life heard of anything more decadent? My word. Strawberries & aether. And all from the confines of her luscious backstage boudoir, dressed in an Erté-esque costume of red and black.

I fear I've stupefying competition in the capacity of *les boudoirian hommes bouches*. Will I ever be able to conjure up anything as exotic for my guests as aethered strawberries? I expect the closest I've come are candied violet cookies, crème de Yvette, and thé du poète solitaire. Romantic, yes. Decadent, no. Des Essenties would have snacked on aethered strawberries and left the cookies and violet liqueur to his aged aunts. Come to think of it, I suppose that Proust himself would have preferred gateaux and thé to strawberries & aether. Perhaps I'm not so provincial after all?

Julian came home this evening from Le Video with not only the requested *Time Regained*, but the 1915 classic, *Les Vampires*. We've much viewing to do, approximately ten hours, without counting the extra features on the *Vampires* disc. I am so looking forward to 1915 Paris, the costumes. The interiors. The hairstyles.

§ Wednesday, April 23, 2003. My company has announced that it is moving to an office park. I am devastated. Currently, we all have private, spacious offices, with windows which overlook the walnut and sycamore trees. Every now and then a squirrel romps by or a hummingbird pauses to gaze in. I'm able to listen to college radio all day if I like, with my door shut to the world. My office walls are decorated with antique Paris maps, vintage English advertising, and friends' artwork. I've a comfy chair and several brass library lamps, a bookcase filled with vintage reference material, including a set of 1932 Collier's encyclopaedias. When we move later this year I'll be relegated to a beastly cubicle, my ca. 1950 L-shaped desk sold to money grubbing, anti-nostalgic furniture dealers. My artwork et al., will languish in storage. For now, Winston's "Industrial Puddles" radio program blasts Nurse With Wound, while I sit writing code, code, code.

There was a time when radio was the only broadcast entertainment. How I'd have loved listening to the Chase & Sanbourn Hour, Amos & Andy, Fibber McGee & Molly, or any one of the other intelligently written programs written for *mass* entertainment. In contrast, network television is so unbearably dreadful. What's happened to our collective perspicacity? It's as though as a nation, we've lost 25 IQ points, dropping from "low average" to "cretinous." Of course, I shouldn't complain. We spend too much time as it is in from of the television set, our jaws slack, the drool cascading down our chins in torrents. Sundance, IFC, or TCM proffer something of interest several times a week, and if not, there are the three *r*'s: reading, writing, and resting.

§ Thursday, April 24, 2003. The question of rôle models has come up within a *coterie* of mine, and it got me to thinking that I don't know of any one person I could call a rôle model. It may seem a bit abstract, but rather than "humar" rôle models, I am moved by events or historical

periods, ideas and concepts, books and films. The trouble with people as rôle models is that there isn't any one person whom I find to be the last word in style, to be utterly compelling, so it would be difficult for me to choose. And frankly, the choices are meager.

I know that many American women find Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly, and Jacqueline Onassis to be graceful and inspirational ladies *ad nauseam*, but to me they are the lowest common denominator, hackneyed, and moth-eaten. It's not that they themselves are commonplace and low, it's their images which have become so. They simply don't hold my interest anymore (if at all ever?) I'm sick to death of them, and understand naught our continued fascination. More significantly, I don't find ladies of this genre to be of interest intellectually, nor at a personal level. They're a little too prim, a little too proper. There's nothing which challenges, and above all, one must be challenged, mustn't one? They're the perfect little *bourgeoises* rôle models – There's no mystery, no fire, not so much as a whiff of "bad girl," no hint that they were interested in *avant-garde* or back room *anything*. It's all just too safe and too respectable, like a girl Mother might choose as wife for her darling son. I wonder if these ladies, ultimately, appeal more to women, than to red-blooded men? Audrey Hepburn is as appealing as a plank of wood.

There are people whom I admire, but it's never based on physical beauty, rather intelligence and creativity. I might add that the people whom I most admire are highly individualistic; they don't seem like they'd have rôle models themselves. Yes, it is possible for me to feel inspired by a person (more often it's a character from a book or film), but never to the degree that I'd say to myself, "Now self, what would Audrey do (or wear, or say)?" It's been said, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." I humbly propose, "Imitation is the realm of the ordinary."

§ Friday, April 25, 2003. Julian telephoned today to tell me the car has been towed to the garage for repairs. *Quel désastre*. This means that my birthday plans for Sunday have been thwarted (picnic lunch in Sausalito, followed by shopping at La Parisienne for a birthday present), we will not be carting home bushels of books from the San Francisco Friends of the Library book sale tomorrow, nor will we be shopping for wine and water this evening at Trader Joe's. Humph! In the words of Robert Burns, "The best-laid plans of mice and men go oft astray, and leave us naught but grief and pain for promised joy." I'm inconsolable at present, but will rebound directly.

For the first time in months, at least six, I wore shoes with heels higher than two inches. My feet didn't hurt *exactly*, but their musculature has atrophied alarmingly, thus leaving them achy and tired. Ironically, in the mail this evening was a birthday gift from Julian's glamorous Mother; a sort of *spa kit*, including "tea tree" oil for tired feet.

Before I quit dancing ballet, I'd extraordinarily muscled feet. (Oddly, my calves haven't atrophied a bit and I'm still not able to zip a pair of boots over them.) I used to, literally, *run around* in shoes heeled as high as four inches, but now limit myself to the less precarious height of two and one half. You see, the ballet was an excessive stress upon my feet. I'd wake up mornings creeping from bed, barely able to walk; it is fearfully hard on them, as well as the joints of the hips and knees. I expect someday I'll need to have my hips replaced, the insides having been ground out by endless *grand ronds de jambe en l'air*.

§ Saturday, April 26, 2003. Miraculously, the car's repairs were completed yesterday, so we were able to attend the book fair and have lunch with Ted Hargrow and his wife Gwyneth at Greens. Greens was a congenial delight; the book sale was a disappointment. I really don't

boring than listening to someone else talk about theirs. When I'm not in my office, I don't want to think, nor talk about work, mine, or anyone else's.

There was a time when I rode the train to work Jimmy Fritz. I think we sat together because it seemed like the polite thing to do, rather than that we actually *enjoyed* one other's company, because we did not. Jimmy would bore me to death talking about work, a full hour in the morning, and an additional hour on our return to San Francisco. I finally decided to avoid Jimmy altogether (vexation slaying decorum as it is wont to do), but to the chagrin of every other passenger, including me, I could still hear him, trumpeting the excruciating details of his day with a more accommodating workmate.

Having to work for a living, is beastly as it is. To be reminded of it at every turn when in public, is *beyond* odious. My train ride is long, and I try and fill it with the wisdom of good books, losing myself in something worthwhile as I lie to the office, and again home. I'm able to avoid Jimmy these days which allows me some peace and quiet, yet, I still come into contact with other *work horses* on an almost daily basis (There's an endless supply; don't you know?) Sitting beside me, behind me, and next to me, they whip out their cell phones at 7:30am (Who are they calling at 7:30am?) to ball out their secretary, arrange a business meeting, partake in a business meeting, announce that they are on the train ("Can you hear me?"), pitch a sale, discuss marketing strategies, &c., all to the obvious annoyance of their fellow passengers who aren't even *awake* yet. And, as noted, it's all done vociferously, not as the situation would imply that it be done, delicately and privately.

§ Thursday, May 8, 2003. The French have a comfortable ease with their bodies that we do not, an acceptance of their flaws, a penchant for embracing their unique, if not, to Americans anyway, most attractive features. These include features which in France are viewed as *normal*, but in America are seen as flaws, things to be disguised or removed: breasts, hips, tummies, thighs, in short, those features which distinguish woman from man.

I was in a dress shop on the right bank this past January, a rather unusual affair considering it was the right bank: *La rive droite* is the centre of Paris' banking and commercial interests, high on appearance and low on substance. Anyone who's visited Paris will know what I mean. Of course, it is known also for its fashion houses, among other dubious distinctions, but this is changing as the more artistically adventuresome open boutiques in Saint-Germain-des-Près, much to the disdain of the *rive gauche*'s longtime, and discrete residents. I can't tell you how upsetting it is for me, and no doubt for them, to find a Louis Vuitton boutique on place St-Germain-des-Près, a Christian Dior shop on place St-Sulpice - It's sacrilegious, I tell you. I suppose that it's hoped by their stock holders that their presence in Saint-Germain-des-Près will somehow legitimize them in the eyes of the left bank artists and intellectuals, making them more money. But I digress ...

The right bank dress shop, Diggi, was very left bank in flavour, very "elegant bohemian." The clothes were as intelligent as they were unusual. I was thus sucked in as into a black velvet hole. There was no escape, but happily so, as I found several unique items which suit me perfectly and complement my wardrobe beautifully, a mix of Edwardian glamour, Italian renaissance, and modern ingenuity.

The clothing was form-hugging, as is the style of *la française*, and as I am American, and accustomed to seeing, as well as wearing, looser fitting garments I was alarmed by the appearance of my figure in all its Diggi-ensuathed glory. Not something I was used to seeing, and I very nearly

strangers. I wash, I brush my hair (most days), avoid clothing with holes or spots, make sure I'm harmonious at the very least. There are the minimum daily requirements.

Time, yet again. You see? I'm perpetually fussing over my dearth of free time. Were my time exclusively my own, I'm convinced I'd spend more time with my *habliment*, fussing over details, finding the just right accessories, allowing myself the luxury of dress. It's all a matter of priority isn't it? With what free time I have, I read, I write. I watch ghastly films like the one I viewed last evening, *Lucy*, the made for television movie about the life of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz (What can I say? That I'm a huge "I Love Lucy" fan?) As I said, ahem, it's all a matter of priority.

§ Tuesday, May 6, 2003. Before heading off to work, I always stop for a bit of sustenance: a large coffee to go, with a bit of ice. You see, the ice cools it down enough so I can begin ingestion *immediatement*. Well sir, I stop at a chain coffee "boutique" near the train station which I shamefully admit is a chain. No, hold on just a second. I won't admit it shamefully. What *is* shameful, is that this infernal chain has put every mom and pop café between my house and the train station out of business. *That* is what's shameful. Me, I'm a caffeine addict, I seek my fix where I can get it. No apologies.

Anyway, here I was, several weeks ago, at this repellent chain vendor of coffee, revolting pastries, trendy sandwiches, and gew-gaws, coffee in hand, turning away from the snot-nosed, surly cretin of a cashier, when he blurted out, "Uh, uh, I gave you too much change, give me back 35 cents." Now, I always pay with exact change, or two bucks even on Mondays. The price of a large coffee is \$1.65; when I receive my change, when it's coming to me that is, I never look at it, I don't count it to be sure it's correct. I just toss it in the ol' handbag and sort things out later. By this point, the change was in the bottom of the handbag with god knows what else, and he's asked me to give him 35 cents back. What could I do? I gave him a disbelieving look, and said, "What?," because I could not believe what I was hearing. One would think that if one louses things up like that, one would just eat it rather than ask the customer to give one money back. One would think. Especially when it's only 35 bloody cents at issue. How should I know that he gave me the wrong change? I don't. And how would he know? He doesn't; it's long gone at the bottom of my handbag. I finally just gave him 35 cents – Take it. It's only 35 cents, after all.

Since then, we've hated each other. I continue to go in, to get my coffee with a little bit of ice (he always fills the cup up to the brim, despite the fact that I always specify "a little bit"), and he continues to grant me service with a sneer.

§ Wednesday, May 7, 2003. On the bus early this morning, on the second leg of my journey to work (There are four legs: walk to bus stop, bus to train station, train to the suburbs, walk to work), I overheard a man and woman discussing work. It wasn't that I was eaves-dropping, they were *loudly* discussing work. (Why is it that the most boring conversations are discussed *tutta forza* and not *sotto voce*?) The woman would ask a question about his métier, he would respond, then she would respond by enthusiastically repeating everything back, "Is that right? So, you *blab, blab, blab*, then *bleh, bleh, bleh*. Isn't that *fascinating*?" Well, no, it isn't for the rest of us. I thought at first that she was trying to chat him up, but they'd have made such an unlikely couple I quickly ditched that theory. The sad truth, is that people love talking about work – theirs, yours, whatever. I don't know why. For goodness sake, why? Talking about one's job is only slightly less

know why we should bother with it anymore. Obviously, someone who knows what they are doing has taken over the donations organization, culling any rare, or even *interesting* books for later sale at the Friend's book shop. What's left for us chumps are dog-eared romance and mystery novels, out-dated computer software manuals, "vintage" books with broken spines or mildewed pages, and heaping piles of Book Club editions.

If the scant pickings weren't enough to turn one off (to add insult to injury, as they say), hordes of grubby, bad-breathed plebeians push and shove their way through the aisles, pushing shoddy carts piled precariously high with their new found treasures, forcing all and sundry to move aside more than they ought do. Now and then, one of these mountains of "literature" keels over, chaos ensues, and apologies are mumbled in response to whispered oaths. I don't think I care to attend any more of these bathsome rumpuses.

§ Sunday, April 27, 2003. My birthday. And a finer day was never had. After lunch in San Francisco, I had the most gratifying shopping orgy at La Parisienne in Sausalito, buying a pair of exquisite turquoise and jet earrings and a Czechoslovakian glass choker for myself, two lily of the valley brooches and pearl earrings for Mother. La Parisienne is *the* store for French jewelry in the Bay Area. The proprietress and her assistants have a deep love for France, and everything French. What a joy to support such a business.

Julian worked *aujourd'hui*, but following an afternoon of answering reference questions at the library, he took me to dinner at one of our favorite San Francisco restaurants, the Baker Street Bistro. The Bistro is unpretentious, comfortable, run completely by *les français*. The menu is filled with classic "grandmother" fare, like *lapin au moutarde* and *blanquette de veau*. I wish a Baker Street Bistro type restaurant had taken over the ill-fated German Cook across the street. Rather, it is to reopen soon as yet another Pakistani - Indian dive. Yawn. There are at least four others in our immediate vicinity.

§ Monday, April 28, 2003. It seems that problems inevitably arise between opinionated people and those without opinion; people who interpret any type of dissent as offensive or confrontational, and those who welcome lively debate – are *stimulated* by lively debate. I speak honestly when asked for my opinion and sometimes when I'm not. I cannot please everyone, and it is not my job to do so. I respect and admire people for their honesty, *especially* when their opinions are not popular; people who are not afraid of musing fathers. Mother always said that she liked honest, *go to hell* people because she knew in no uncertain terms where she stood with them. I agree. I think that Americans often misunderstand acquiescence for harmony. I propose that it is possible to disagree and still have respect, and even love for one another.

One wonders why people like this even open their mouths, since ultimately there's nothing to discuss. It's all just so much ego stroking. I remember a particularly boring company X-mas party, where we did nothing but tell each other how great we looked – My eyes were rolling up into the back of my head.

So many people go through life like zombies, never questioning their own ideas, values, morals. Never seeking or learning what other viewpoints are about. Let's all just go through life like lemmings, opiated by reality TV (because they have no reality of their own) and video games. I suppose that it boils down to intelligence. People with intelligence are always looking to learn, are always seeking mental stimulation, pushing their boundaries, and pushing other peoples buttons.

Why sacrifice one's self for the benefit of fitting in? I never do, and yet I am saddened when people misunderstand my frankness, as a personal attack on *them*. One must agree in order to be liked? *Vive la difference*.

§ Thursday, May 1, 2003. I've been feeling so out of sorts these last few days, hence my absence from the journal. I feel as though everything that has come from my mouth or pen has been utterly disagreeable. I've been frightfully contemptuous of everything, and worse, everybody. I've always known that I've an artistic temperament, but is it *that* which is my problem? Julian seems to think so. Even so, why do I feel so contemptuous? Why am I so judgemental, so damned critical of everything in my way? To understand oneself is difficult. And is it possible? I try to be self-aware, but fear that I am not. Perhaps I have not been scratching deeply enough beneath *my* surface; it's much easier to scratch away at others, *nest-ce pas?* To sharpen ones claws on fence-posts.

I've always been a loner, never a follower. I've always sought out what's unusual, what's unique, what's arcane (Well, to some extent. I think of Chinese's interests and know that I am a hopeless dilettante when it comes to the esoteric.) I've never felt the need to belong to a group, indeed, I've shunned "the group." But why? What is this need for individuality? Do I feel the masses closing in on me? Do I feel insignificant and unimportant deep down inside? Am I secretly yearning for attention though I'd run shrieking should I get it? And indeed, I *do* belong to a group as such, we're perhaps just milling about, eyeing one another suspiciously, shedding clothing, ideas, interests, as soon as we spy that it's been sanctioned by another "individual." In the cult of the uncommon, one must strive, above all, to be exclusive—Pathetic. I'm filled with self-loathing, and yet I'd rather die than be like *them*.

Mother always insisted, "You just want people to look at you Lucie." But no, that is not true at all. I loathe it when people look at me. I am actually quite shy. Where I'm at odds with myself is my taste for the outrageous, the theatrical. I love clothes and jewelry which would inspire Beardsley. And then of course, there is my penchant for black, my interests, my affected manner of speech, all which cause people to know, that I am different. But no, I definitively do not want people to look at me. I swear upon my signed, first edition copy of *Les fleurs du mal* that I do not.

To add insult to injury, I received hate mail today. My outspoken views are not always taken kindly. I'm actually rather pleased that I warrant "hate mail", yet disturbed that I've affected people so dramatically. But I've figured out something important today, something fundamental about the differences between people. Since I am hopelessly stuck on Paris and its imagery, may I take the liberty of explaining it in terms of "vive gauche" and "vive droite"?

Table 1:	
RIVE GAUCHE	RIVE DROITE
<i>La vie en noir</i>	<i>La vie en rose</i>
Dark thoughts	Rose-coloured spectacles
Avant-garde arts	Popular arts
Anti-bourgeois pessimism	Social optimism
Aesthetic & intellectual invention	Mental & material comfort
Symbolic challenge	Emblems of distinction

I'm, as you may have guessed, a "vive gauche" type. I'm often at odds with the "vive droite." I don't particularly like being at odds with anyone, but it seems to be a common and unshakable theme throughout my life. The only thing to be done is shrug and move on.

§ Friday, May 2, 2003. What is luxury? For me, it's freedom, the ability to do what I want, when I want. My ultimate luxury? To have a day where there are no demands made upon my time or person, to lounge on the divan, eat, or not what I please, read, write, view film, all undisturbed. What is luxury? A yacht? A suite at the Ritz? Monogrammed, 400 thread count sheets? A fleet of Manolo Blahniks in every style and colour? A meal for four at the Red Lobster? How is luxury defined? Something that is an indulgence rather than a necessity. How about a new fountain pen? Dinner on TV trays in front of the idiot box? Sure, and then some, but I guess what's essential, is that luxury is defined by the individual, and perhaps changes from day to day. For someone who is housebound, luxury might be the ability to go out each day, the luxury of mobility.

Isn't it telling that my greatest luxury is time? I spend an inordinate amount of time plotting how to get more of it, how best to use the time I have, how to *steal* time, regretting time wasted, bemoaning that I've not got more.

§ Saturday, May 3, 2003. I've been thinking a lot about the PBS "history really program," Manor House. Isn't it natural for one to place himself amidst the drama? Would I have been a servant, or a master? Could I have withstood the grinding workload of the scullery maid? Would I have cracked, faced with the daily boredom, and intellectually unchallenging life as did the spinster aunt whose existence was limited to bicycle rides (What would Freud have said?) and chatting with the insufferable homosexual tutor, Mr. Raj-Singh (Although I must say, his suits made me swoon. They were oh so delightfully country tweedy, like something out of a Nancy Mitford novel.)

In conclusion, I feel sure that I would've been happiest, and best suited, as kitchen maid, assistant to the lovable cummudgeon Monsieur Dubiard, *chef de cuisine*. (Don't you just know that I just adore crabby people?) To boot, he's French (or is that evident, what with the crabbiess and all?) After working at his side for three months, I'd have the vocabulary to order from any Parisian restaurant, reprimand any Coupole waiter, or shop the farmer's market at Lodioc.

§ Monday, May 5, 2003. Jean-Pierre Léaud's birthday. How I'd love to write him, but I'm afraid my tone would be render my letter nothing but a mush note. But how else to obtain an 8 x 10 glossy, ca. *La Maman et la Putain*, to be the centerpiece of the shrine I've yet to build?

I had a close friend once, who would tell me that I dressed either "very badly, or very well." (We are no longer friends, but it has nothing to do with her criticism.) She was, is, right. My life is such that on a daily basis, I've not the time, nor the energy to think through a "presentable" costume, so I end up wearing what is easiest: quick and comfortable. My actual dress is in total opposition to my theory of dress, which calls for elegance, style, impeccable grooming, and above all, distinction (individuality). Why the dichotomy? With me, there is *never* any half-way. It's either done well, or it's not done at all. Consequently, if I'm not able to go "whole hog", I do as little as possible to get by, to look acceptable, to keep from garnering disgusted stares from

§ Monday, June 16, 2003. Jeffrey Cool is back at work after taking a week off to move back to San Francisco from the East Bay. He stopped me in the hallway this morning to ask me if I'd ever been to The Buccaneer. "What's the Buccaneer?" "A bar. You've never been to The Buccaneer?" No Jeffrey, we've not been to The Buccaneer, and I was surprised to hear that he and his wife Sharon like going to bars. They aren't what you'd call the bar-going type. I promised vaguely that we'd all get together soon at The Buccaneer once they've settled in. When pressed for our phone number I asked for his instead; we've recently changed ours to shake off people like Jeffrey.

Another lousy ride home on the train. The train itself, despite several conductors I'd like to kick in the pants, is a top-notch outfit. It's the passengers I've a problem with. Besides the usual cell phone yakkers, shrill women, pizza-eaters, sports fans puking up beer, shrieking teen-aged girls, whistlers, snorers, nail-filers, gum-snappers, and loud-talkers, there are the fidgeters.

The fidgeters must always have been fidgety. They just can't seem to settle down, rustling through their bags, eating things out of rusty bags, pulling faces, jacking with their hair. Today I observed a simian-tipped woman, 60ish, splayed out all over the place, taking up four seats with her suitcase on wheels, discarded tweed jacket (it's summer mind you) and straw hat replete with American flag pin, faded, shapeless carryall, faded, shapeless, pot-bellied body.

Soon after she sat down, she began fiddled with a big Ziplock baggie full of medicine, ate a bag of Corn Nuts (dug out from their plastic bag, one by one with thick pink claws), slurped from an old water bottle, ate an apricot and a tiny Tupperware jar full of blueberries. She fluffed her magenta hair with an afro pick, put eye-drops in her eyes, re-applied her shocking pink lipstick and green eyeliner (after digging through a voluminous make-up bag for several minutes), blew her nose lustily, studied two train maps (which from where I sat, seemed identical), dug through her bag once again, retrieved a package of Advil Cold & Sinus from the Ziplock medicine bag and gnawed at the medicine's foil pouch with her horse teeth for several minutes. Having given up, she dug a large pair of orange plastic handled scissors from her suitcase and cut open the foil pouch (why didn't she just do this in the first place?). She then carefully dumped the medicine into the tiny Tupperware jar to replace the blueberries. After digging around in her purse for a good two minutes, she pulled out a blank book and flipped through it until she found an unsealed letter. She sealed the letter using what I surmise was blueberry juice, then put it into a side pocket of her wheeled suitcase. She clean her glasses with a corner of her southwestern styled t-shirt, fooled with an up-til-now unseen Tupperware tub full of cherries, then blessedly put on her tweed coat and straw hat replete with American flag pin, and detrained at San Carlos.

§ Tuesday, June 17, 2003. Feeling flush after our newfound, and financially conservative decision to stay put, we did a little shopping on our way to work. There's nothing like a little shopping spree to make one appreciate one's financial status. Julian was looking for a pair of linen slacks, and me, well, I'm always on the lookout for a pair of unusual shoes.

While I can't afford to shop willy-nilly at Wilkes-Bashford, one can always browse. The shoes are something indeed, always unusual, little-known, but none-the-less note-worthy offerings from designers like Emma Hopes (Regalia for the Feet.), Christian Louboutin (those *red* soles.), Jimmy Choo (what's the big deal anyway?), Ironie, and Wilkes-Bashford's own designs, which are beautifully made *and* practical. But browsing is what inevitably leads that which we can't live with out – Julian found a beautiful pair of green linen slacks, and I, a gorgeous pair of black and

guitar through a distortion peddle, American "Gothic", Bernard Maybeck, *Slacker* (film), Fats Waller, California bungalows, The Byrds, "Dragnet", Frank Lloyd Wright, Film Noir, bridge parties, Steve Buscemi, Campbell's Tomato Soup, New Orleans, Mike 'n' Ike's, freffies, antique malls, Anne Sexton, Mission San Juan Capistrano, *Paper Moon* (film), R. Crumb, orange creamsicles, the Bushy Berkeley "close-up girls", chirping crickets at twilight, Upton Sinclair, Country Western Swing, Edie Sedgwick, birthday cake, Andy Warhol and The Factory, The Velvet Underground, tire swings, John Steinbeck, WPA, Christina Ricci (before she lost weight), The Ashcan School, Peet's coffee, Anton LaVey, *Sunset Boulevard* (film), Johnny Depp, 1930's era kitchens and bathrooms, Jack Lemmon, produce stands, canoeing, Steve Zahn, *The Last Picture Show* (film), Rudy Vallée (Hi-Lo everybody.) old motels with good neon signs, Eddie Cantor, summer camp, The Little Rascals, Laurel and Hardy, vintage cookbooks, Chex Mix, Bette Davis, Otter Pops, Anthropologie, Elmer Bischoff, ice-cream trucks, fish sticks, California Plane trees, Jean Harlow, sno-cones, Joan Blondell, 1959 Cadillac Coupe-de-Ville, meatloaf and mashed potatoes, Christopher Walken as "The Continental", Halloween, 4th of July, Zion National Park, Edward Hopper, X, Jim Jarmusch, *AntiChrist Superstar*, *The Breakfast Club* (film), 1950s-era dude ranches, John Garfield, vintage Sunset Magazine, Thora Birch (before she lost weight), chicken apple sausage, The Ramones, Hillbilly Boogie, Richard Diebenkorn, *The Virgin Suicides* (film), Jack Kerouac, Taste Freeze and Dairy Queen, Betsey Johnson, California citrus groves, Donna Karan, vintage cowboy boots, college radio, Lauren Ezersky, *A Christmas Story* (film), Julia Morgan, society and hotel orchestras circa 1930, Carson McCullers, *Gone With the Wind* (film), David Lynch, crumbling industrial landscapes, George Balanchine and the New York City Ballet, California Impressionism, ghost towns, Neil Young, Piedmont Cemetery in Oakland California, and finally, Jadite glassware.

There *are* good things about America, and American culture, but more and more, one has to seek them out. They aren't as obvious as they used to be; we've taken them for granted, and they disappear. I've been told that I'm looking for a Rockwellian dream of American, and perhaps I am, just as I seek a Proustian vision of Paris, and a Mitfordian version of England. It seems I'm always seeking the other side of the rainbow.

§ Sunday, May 18, 2003. I accompanied Julian to the library today. It is the last day before the summer closure. The library is housed in an old school building and inhabits the space which was once the auditorium; the classrooms are now city offices. I love this old, small-town, school building. It has wonderful energy, the energy of youth, of cafeteria lunches, chalkboards, math tests, spelling bees, playground games, linoleum hallways, summer vacation.

The library is surrounded by large plane trees, and a lawn which was once the asphalt playground. Off to one side there is a basketball court, to the other a sandy spot for swings and such. Before Julian begins duty at noon, we take our luncheon in the park, under the shade of the plane trees, watching tots throw sand down the slide, while their parents coax them to eat their carrot sticks and baloney sandwiches.

When the library opens, we all file in. Julian opens the large windows to let in the warm spring breeze, while I grab the latest copy of French Elle, spending the rest of the afternoon with Larousse, absorbing as best I can trends in French fashion, food, and style – it's not a bad way to pass the time. An occasional patron might snore, or a passed of snot-nosed squirts might scramble in with their oblivious parents every now and again. But despite these infrequent, minor disturbances, I adore going to the library with Julian on Sundays, and I will miss it this summer.

Like back-to-school ghosts, we will be back again come fall, after a long summer's recess.

§ Wednesday, May 21, 2003. I'm not a very social person. I have a few close friends, and a wider group of people whom I'd call acquaintances, not actual friends. When I do have free time, as you know, I'm very careful how I spend it. I don't go out very much, nor entertain at home often. Consequently, for many years, we weren't in particular demand, no one tried to chat-us-up, or woo us; It seemed that we were the ones doing all the chatting and wooing. Suddenly however, we're being invited to dinner and lunch, to films and museums, or just coffee or drinks after work. It's really something. It's as though our energy has changed, our gravitational orbits increased in strength. Friends are like flowers in a garden, they've to be tended before they'll bloom.

Ernest telephoned to ask us to dinner Sunday night. Alas, we are busy, but will reschedule for another weekend. Ernest, who lives in our building, met us at our building's annual, Labor Day BBQ. We've been friendly ever since, having a mutual interest in the French language and travel (Ernest is an airline host.) And then, last Thursday, we ran into Dick Winchell, again. We've plans to meet up with him and our mutual friend Nico for drinks next week. I've much to say about Dick and Nico, but another time ...

We're *finally* getting together with Jamie and Hugh *chez nous* this Saturday evening. It's been months since we've seen the both of them together. Too long.

§ Thursday, May 22, 2003. I like makeovers, but makeovers are ephemeral. It is possible to pick up some tricks, but permanent, real makeover change is futile. Intrinsic change, even the most trivial visual change, must find its origin from within (and that's why it's called "intrinsic." I've got a hair for the obvious, don't I?)

Isn't it true that for most of us, any dramatic change in our personality or outward appearance happens before the completion of college, the terminus of our education? I think of people who are permanently struck in a time warp, their hairstyle, musical tastes, clothing choices indicative of when they passed their youth. By the time we've reached 25, we're pretty much set in our opinions and beliefs. We've successfully ground out a comfortable groove for ourselves, and the image we present to the world. On the other hand, some people are constantly in flux – Their needle won't stay in its groove. Some may view this as odd, schizophrenic even, but I disagree. I see it as a sign of a person who is growing and changing, evolving; how dull to be the same person for 80 odd years.

Women are mercurial by nature, more driven by the need for change than men, hence their natural propensity for "makeovers" and re-decorating, a constant, nagging, yet subconscious static that it might be a good idea to reinvent something, anything. It is interesting and fun, but perhaps it also fits a biological need to keep one's mate interested, if not guessing? And I agree with it all, as a fellow female who loves to refine and edit my own image and life vision. But rather than constantly reinvent, or search for some ideal "other", I've identified that which I want to "become", my "ideal self", so that my choices and interests constantly underscore and emphasize, rather than fragment or launch afresh.

But how is this done? How does one cognize this vision of the "ideal self"? How can one write one's own, internalized, life manifesto? Pursuing my interests with verve, digging deep within myself to find what I like, with no regard to the needs or agendas of others. Being shameless,

Thursday morning we began our disquieting, though normally innocuous walk down O'Farrell street to the bus and train stations, stepping over drums played haphazardly in doorways, warily walking past parks idling dealers, side-stepping withered, pot-bellied whores, fast food wrappers and newspaper paving at our well-shod feet. At O'Farrell and Powell we were almost mugged. For me, this was the last straw, to use a stupid cliché (I'm sorry I can't be more innovative today.) Later that morning, the foul and intolerable Jimmy Fitz set me to crying, brow-beating me about the beauty of the new offices we'll be moving to in several months. Since when, I'd like to know, are cubicles, 21st-century glass-faced, business-park, air-conditioned nightmares preferable to private offices, Spanish revival, plane trees, birds and squirrels? In a fit of desperation, I spent the rest of the day lining up apartments to view, and setting appointments with our realtor and tax accountant between crying jags. Can't one have *some* happiness in this otherwise unendurable world? Damn the consequences. Oh, to be aesthetically challenged like the Jimmy Fitz's of this world, to go about neither affected by the awkwardness and gracelessness of 21st-century "style," nor its effects on society at large. I should be happy too, should I be able three nights on Lean Cuisine, laugh uproariously at "King of the Hill," and gleefully don the, dare I say it, "clothing," sold by The Gap.

But I digress. Things are never as they seem. They are never as easy, nor as idyllic as one would hope. For the Jimmy Fitz's of this world, yes, but for us, sadly, tragically, no. The apartments we viewed with great hope and expectancy were either large, expensive and cruddy (as in, other people's *crud*), or reasonably priced, impeccably clean, but unbelievably small, e.g. 250 square feet. And had we thought about rent increases every year? And would we (rather I) be able to bear a teensy bit? How about the view of the walls outside our windows? The parking garage next door? The cable car which clacks along just outside the window until 12:30 a.m. each night? The sliding mirrored doors in the living room? How about the bathroom-sized sink in the kitchen? The creepy, overly-friendly building manager? The children's basketball hoop below our bedroom windows? The view of Civic Centre and its '60s-era architecture? Can a Nob or Russian Hill address make up for any of this? In the end, no. It could not.

And while we were almost, *almost* seduced by a very small apartment at 1401 Jones with an amazing green and black Art Deco-era tiled bathroom, we reluctantly, yet with relief, have resigned ourselves to live at least for a few more years on O'Farrell. How nice it will be to still save \$3400 in taxes every year *and* \$500 in rent each month. We'll still be able to afford to go to Paris every year we emphatically tell ourselves, and we've more living space now than we could possibly afford should we be renting. And while it is a fact that our neighborhood isn't the best, one could fare much worse. We can take Post instead of O'Farrell every morning – It seems the farther one travels up the hill, the less one is likely to encounter illegitimate people. And the noise? Well, it can be a problem, but there is nothing we can do about it. As with the neighborhood, one could do much worse. We *are* in the back, on the eighth floor. There's nary a parking lot nor cable car in sight, though there is the playground nearby (it's a *cheerful* noise, they said), and the 38 is a damned, bloody nuisance. Why *can't* the city put mufflers on their buses? Am I the only one who's noticed?

I feel good about staying. I *do* love our house, our home. We're going ahead with the refinancing, and to appease our somewhat deflated dreams of nabob grandeur, we've decided to redo our bathroom. Green and black? We'll see.

I've recently learned, that in France, salaried employees typically have lunch in a company restaurant (*restaurant d'entreprise*) where the meal is paid for by the employee according to a sliding scale set up by the business. If there is no company restaurant, an employee may have lunch in a nearby café or restaurant where they use a voucher, or ticket, bought from their employer which subsidized the meal. These tickets give the employee the right to a meal up to a certain amount of euros, or number of meals. Should the meal cost more than the ticket's value, the employee pays the difference.

How utterly civilized. An employee is able to sit down to a nutritious, and pleasurable lunch because it is affordable and easily available. I've always known that the French eat lunches out, at restaurants or, more typically, cafés, but had no idea how they could afford this on a daily basis. This certainly isn't done in the United States; where an affordable lunch is either fast food (charming cafés are the exception rather than the rule here), or microwaveables brought from home. *Egad*. Chalk another one up for France.

While this system does have its nay-sayers, quoting France's higher taxes (though I wonder), or suggesting they'd rather have the additional cash than a subsidized meal everyday, I propose that one eats lunch anyway, it's not free. And furthermore, exactly what *are* we getting for our tax dollars?

§ **Sunday, June 15, 2003.** I've been preoccupied this entire week, unable to do anything but obsess about our living situation, searching futilely for answers, finding some, ultimately accepting none, riding an emotional roller coaster which has left me feeling akin to a wrung out rag – limp, a bit bloated, wiped high and low, left to drip dry on a dank utility porch, praying the mold doesn't get to me. My eyes are puffy, and I'm tired. I should like a nap and an ice tea when I wake.

It all began innocently enough Wednesday morning with a call to Kathy Fang inquiring about refinancing. Realizing that we will not save very much by refinancing (a paltry \$120 per month), I started to think that maybe it might be better to move, to sell our place and go back to renting, to leave the Tenderloin once and for all, this albatross around our necks, and begin our lives anew (once again.) in a better, quintessential San Francisco neighborhood, Nob or Russian Hill – Only the very best for us, right? Rents have come down significantly from three, even four years ago, and there's currently a glut of units on the market. It's really quite incredible, the state of the San Francisco rental market, and so I'd begun to entertain the idea that it would perhaps be possible to find our dream apartment, roomy, classic, with a landmark view perhaps, no noise, some greenery maybe?, near shops and restaurants which one would actually enjoy frequenting, in short, a step up from our present, more *bohemian* living quarters.

Excited, I called Mother (One always discusses these things with one's parents, doesn't one?). Mother talked me out of it, as she is apt to do, cautious and conservative in the extreme, and I had to admit, grudgingly, that she was right. Should we sell our humble condominium, our cozy little apartment, it would be unlikely that we'd ever be able to buy again in high-priced San Francisco. Our mortgage payments aren't any higher than rents, and though I adore our warm nest, our haven from this despicable world, I detest even more the neighborhood, and the noise frequently drives me into irritable fits of hysterics. One always wants to improve their living situation, doesn't one? But certainly not to the detriment of one's overall financial situation. Problem solved, though resignedly, and not a little disappointedly.

brazen, self-possessed. Consuming culture the way one would snacks, with a vacuous rumble in my stomach at an all-you-can-eat buffet. By listening to my intuition, bravely making my way through the morass of aesthetics, and though it may seem quite forlorn (having waited just for me all this time), seizing what's mine; learning to recognize and take notice of that which speaks to me. I question everything, judge, and am critical. I pay heed to my own reasoning. I remind myself that the goal is not to alienate those around me, but to accept that they may, in fact, become alienated as I evolve.

Learning and education, true discovery of one's self will effectuate change on the outside; if follows that changes within will manifest themselves as the choices in what one eats and wears, which films one sees, which music one listens to, how one style's one's hair, &c. As you become the unique person you were born to be, your personal identity will be expressed not only in the profound, but in the seemingly mundane quotidian choices one makes.

§ **Friday, May 23, 2003.** Jamie called today to change our Saturday plans. He suggested that since the weather has been so beautiful that we all drive to Napa Valley for lunch. I'm excited, but dread equally a trip in the car. When I lived in Berkeley, I drove everywhere. One had to. I never worried much about auto-fatalities, but now that I'm not driving (I never need to), the idea of being in a car petrifies me. Visions from the truly gruesome, but fascinating book, *Car Crashes & Other Sad Stories* annoyingly come to mind. Alarmed at my own growing neurosis, I'll go, if only to prove to myself that travel by car is not as fraught with danger as I would suspect it to be.

I've not been to Napa Valley for several years at least. Julian and I spent one fragrant summer there with our friend Annie Henderson who was house-sitting for a well-known sculptor (she had worked off and on as his assistant.) His house was at the end of a long road out of Napa, set on several hilltop acres, next to a vineyard that stretched well over the hill and beyond. There was a pool, and an *au natural* yard studded with his enormous, modern metal sculptures. We spent a lot of time barbequing and drinking wine by the poolside until one day, after returning from a wine-tasting foray, we found his son, shotgun in hand, demanding to know what we were doing in his Father's house. Well, Annie got it all straightened out, but boy, what a scare and a what mess. He'd come up to the house to spend the weekend, found our things, and thought that hobos had run amok. Of course, we *had* to leave right away – It was the right thing to do. I was absolutely mortified. Annie was sorry, and we forgave her, and yet, it only reinforced our opinion of her as a person who's not always the most reliable.

Annie thought it fine to park on the sidewalk when no legal parking space was forthcoming, used my name once to subscribe to the newspaper (without me knowing) when her own credit ran out. There were stacks of unpaid bills in her house, and termination of service notices stuffed under her couch (Still, the utilities were always *on*.) Annie would talk me into calling in sick then we'd drive up to her family's estate in the Sierra Nevada for a weekend in the woods, my nerves on edge the entire time. Annie was fun, but she wasn't grounded in reality, and a very bad influence on mine.

Annie's main problem, was her family. They were rich, and they would bail her out of any trouble she got into, pay her bills, support her. She never learned personal responsibility, and she had no concept of how an average person lives, nor any respect for his responsibilities. And then, Annie's family was undependable. She was sent home from Oxford because her Father *forgot* to pay her tuition. He once offered to buy her a building, then reneged after she'd had one all lined

up. He spent all his time at the race-track, gambling, gambling away her inheritance. I remember she worried about it. Her uncles and her Father were always bickering about money, though they all had *plenty* of it. My own family story is much the same, only this same tale came to pass before I was born. Annie and I had a lot in common, we even shared an ancestor, making us distant cousins.

Annie had gobs of friends. She'd often throw enormous parties in her warehouse space, cook up an entire salmon, order up a keg of beer, then we'd frolic with mad delight until we dropped from exhaustion at Dawn. Annie knew just everyone in the art scene. We were always going to weird warehouse parties in scary Oakland neighborhoods, where Gwar was playing, attending art shows where bike messengers mixed with Pacific Heights society matrons, or visiting friends who needed her support while they kicked their speed habits. She was compassionate, and was always available for a heart-to-heart *chez elle*. Annie didn't really work, but always had a mysterious, largish supply of cash; she was up for shopping for anything, anytime, anywhere. I'll always remember striking with laughter at *Nordstrom Outlet* with her, over a pair of hideous pair of gold shoes – This was such a *Annie moment*. Or, Annie imitating Ethyl Merman singing Led Zepplin's Stairway to Heaven as we drove pell-mell down interstate 80. Annie was a scream, and I loved her.

I'm no longer friends with Annie. She just got to be too much for me to bear. She couldn't hold a job. She'd show me clothing she'd "bought", and yet the anti-theft devices were still attached. Her *friends* seemed to become more and more sycophantic than symbiotic. And Annie was threatened by Julian; she wanted me all to herself. This *really* was the cause of our separation. Yet, Annie was a light in my life at a time when there wasn't any. She was a very good friend in many ways – She changed my life. I miss her terribly, but acknowledge that it's best I stay away.

§ Saturday, May 24, 2003. Expecting to find myself in Napa at noon, dining on wine country delicacies, I instead found myself speeding towards Bodega Bay in Janie's new Subaru station wagon. Not that I don't *like* Bodega Bay, after all, it's home of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, dotted with salt-water taffy stands, and the harbour contains *real* fishing boats – It's filled with plenty of North Coast atmosphere. But, there is something about the North Coast which I find off-putting. To a degree, I'm drawn to it. To a degree, I enjoy myself while I'm there, but the North Coast leaves me, to a greater degree, with vague depression. It's a very sad place.

Is it the fact that many people go there to die, holed up in cliff-top cabins as they waste away and grow old? Or is it that many people's ashes end up strewn upon North Coast beaches? Could it be the sad history of the Native Americans who were driven off their land, the Russians who failed in their colonizing attempts, or the hundreds of shipwrecks over the years, their doomed human cargo gently waiting to and fro in the briny deep? I don't know, but the North Coast is a bit creepy, and creepy in a bad way; it has *bad vibes* if you ask me.

Julian and I have oft times rented a room in Gualala for a long weekend; attracted by the waves and the woods we pretend we're in Northern Scotland, walking the moors like Kathy and Heathcliff. We always stay at the Sea Cliff. It offers the best views and privacy for the price. Nearby is the Surf Market, where we get sandwiches and drinks for picnicking in our room. It's extremely nice, quiet, and restful. My favorite memories are of stays during the month of November, when if we're lucky, the first of the big Pacific storms rolls in from the Gulf of Alaska. The Gualala river busts through its sandbar, while huge waves roll over it from the other side. It's dramatic, and I can sit all day in my room at the Sea Cliff, sipping cocktails, watching the sea. Inevitably though,

he who is as unique as herself, an artist and a dreamer – Another loner. Yet Nino is strong, a little more worldly, and perhaps a little less sensitive than she, able to protect and to care for her, as she has cared for others. In him, she has found her match, and her best friend. And so, the tears she sheds near the end of the film, as she imagines a world for herself without love, are fleeting – Nino and Annie happily find each other, riding off into the maze of Paris on his Vespa. What a fairytale. But for me, my reality, what I had always wanted, what I had always sought, and what I found when I met Julian, my own, true to life, fairytale.

§ Friday, June 6, 2003. Many of the differences between French and American culture (and primary sources of friction) can be explained away by the continuum of cultural attitude, one end being *low-context*, the other *high-context*. A low-context culture is one in which people express, or share information by explicit statements – Little is communicated via relationships or through internalization. People don't readily understand, nor share the same values and history. The United States is a low-context culture. On the other hand, a high-context culture, like France, is one where people share values and history. They have a common background, one where much information is readily known (internalized), or expressed by the physical context of any given situation.

Important contrasts between low, and high-context cultures:

Table 2:

Low-Context Culture (United States)

Direct communication: Get to the point.
Time moves quickly and in a straight line.
In an initial meeting context, a certain level of formality is expected, such as shaking hands and using *titles*. However, Low tolerance for silence.
Interactive: Hey boss, are you sure that's the right way to do this?
High tolerance for questions.
Self-disclosing (personal).
Low value placed on "platonic" communication (small talk): "Let's get down to business".
Precise and technical.
Adversarial (opposing opinions), blunt (to the point).

Adapted from: American Legal English: Using Language in Legal Contexts, 1999. D. Lee, C. Hall & M. Hurley. The University of Michigan Press

Another interesting difference between the United States, and many other countries, is our beastly stinkiness when it comes to vacation and time off. I'm lucky. We *do* get 20 days per year, 10 more than your average working Joe or Jane. I can't imagine, at this point, not getting four weeks per year. It's *inhuman*, is what it is.

I'm continually appalled by the acquiescence of the working man in America to the standard conditions he's expected to work under and terrible benefits he's given. There's a common misconception that the world just wouldn't turn, if we didn't give in completely to the powers that be, the business owners and the lawmakers. No one seems to question this. Why not I wonder? Why this blind trust by people who clearly don't have our best interests in mind?

friends, and while I always had a best, a special girlfriend, I've never, ever been one-of-the-girls. I don't like to discuss girly things, for example, what to wear or what to shop for, how to style one's hair, or do one's nails, and least of all, how to catch a man which always degenerates into, "Men are dogs." I can't and won't abide this kind of talk. Ironically, I *am* a girly-girl. I have a closet stuffed with gorgeous clothing. I scrutinize (or not.) my daily costume, adore artistic jewelry (nyah, nyah, Colette.), manicure my own nails, wear lipstick daily, and in every other way, am quite the affected, delicate, insufferable little princess.

An acquaintance of mine recently ventured that women, French women in particular, pay special attention to their appearances solely for the purpose of keeping their men, or at the very least, to glean from them admiration and complements. That their beauty is instigated as a by-product of their competitiveness, and not to be justified as an activity nor an aim in and of itself. I had at first dismissed this question as frivolous, and impossible to address, but the more I think about it, the more I like it as it shines a particularly direct light on an Americanism I've never relished.

French women have a self-respect that is sorely missing in our modern, American society. The fact that French women may *seem* to take exceptional care with their appearance says as much about *us* as it does about them. Compared with us Americans, obese slob in jeans and sneakers, hair in raty ponytail, nursing a bag of Doritos brand tortilla chips as we stomp down the street like truck drivers, they *are* immaculately groomed, slim and stylish, i.e. feminine – They *are* the paradigm of chic. But there was a time, dear reader, when it was *de rigueur* for American women to take care of themselves as well. The issue isn't that French women take special care with their appearance, I think that women from most cultures do. What is to be especially remarked upon, is that American women, as a rule, do not. And when they do, it *is* to attract men, garner complements, and get attention. Why else would one bother?

§ **Thursday, June 5, 2003.** There is a new film I'd like to see, *L'Auberge espagnole*, a French film written and directed by Cédric Klapisch, who also wrote and directed *Chacun cherche son chat*. We've made plans to see it with Jamie and Hugh at the Sunday afternoon *matinée*. I should like to be able to see more film, but I've neither the time nor the money to go. When a new French film comes to town however, we almost always make a point to attend.

When we were in Paris in the late summer of 2001, we saw posters everywhere advertising the yet unknown (in the States) film, *Amélie*. I remember Julian pronounced upon seeing Audrey Tatton's cartoonish, but adorable face, "I'm *not* seeing *that* film. Too precious." I agreed, knowing that indeed, someday, we would. (Such are the ways and means of a wise woman.) Months later, on a rainy, dreary March evening, we did see *Amélie* at my favorite theatre, the Clay on Fillmore. *Amélie* had been playing there for months, and I wanted to see it while there was still time to do so, and we were *not* disappointed. We left the theatre in tears, choking back sobs, the both of us vowing to return to Paris as soon as we could.

Why was *Amélie* such a success? What collective chord did it strike within everyone's heart? For me, it was the identification I had with, and understanding I felt for Amélie, a loner, a young woman who delights in the little things, who is touched by that which to others would be insignificant. And as she understands this in herself, she seeks to bring forth these nascent characteristics in others, especially her father, who had lost his zest, and delight in life. Amélie, the loner, a little odd in her skirts and brogans, private, silent, and reflective, but finds in the end

after the show is over, the dolor descends. The wild turkeys, nor the seals can jolly me out of my moods. We've come home several days early from Gualala numerous times – I just felt I had to get home, back to Mr. Darcy and Dinah Moppet. And now I wonder, with some regret, if I shall ever feel like going back?

§ **Monday, May 26, 2003.** I've been roped into seeing the horrendous Hollywood film, *The Matrix Reloaded*. OK. So I exaggerate. It wasn't *that* bad. It was not as bad as I'd expected it to be. Keanu Reeves was earnestly sincere as Neo, his best role since he played Matt in *The River's Edge*. But it did have more Kung-Fu fight scenes, car chases, and explosions than I'd thought it would have; I caught myself yawning numerous times. Ah, the movies. Where entrance for two to a two-bit film will cost you a twenty, and where an ensue coke will set you back \$2.75.

But, I did have a good time. Really. I did. It was Carmella's birthday, and it was *so good* to be with her, and to meet her dearest friends, all of whom I like immensely, and whom I got to know better over a late evening meal at The Grand Café following the film, er, I mean movie. We all drank Martinis, not something I normally drink, but it *is* the Carmella gang favorite, so one goes with the flow, and it's so easy to do within the wombish confines of the Grand Café. It's so homey, such a comfort despite its grandiosity, it's rather an extension of our living room, as Julian and I often meet friends there for lunch, or drinks after work. The atmosphere is very *Belle Époque*, and it's just around the corner from our house. Everyone should fix upon a Grand Café.

§ **Tuesday, May 27, 2003.** Several years ago, Julian and I got second jobs with the aim that we would pay our bills, and buy an apartment in San Francisco. We've still bills, but we did manage to buy an apartment. We worked weekends and evenings, every spare moment was given over to the winning of the almighty dollar. But why the fervor? Simply put, we had real estate fever, and nothing would cure it but ownership, ownership of a tiny piece of highly coveted San Francisco.

Part of our zeal had to do with how rootless we've both been. Our Mothers were both *movers*, and so are we. Julian has counted more than twenty abodes that he's lived in as an adult, and me, since leaving home, I've lived in fifteen:

1) Downtown Long Beach, California. This was my first apartment after graduating from college. It was exciting, because it would be my first experience living away from home in a place which was all mine, but it was terrifying because it was in the worst neighborhood in Long Beach – I couldn't walk outside my door; I had to drive everywhere because it was so bad. Nights I'd hear gunshots in the alley outside my bedroom window, or police helicopters would hover nearby, shining their spotlights into my yard. But the apartment itself was huge, the bottom floor of a 1910 mansion. My landlord lived in the mansion next door, these two houses formed a sort of compound, surrounded by a white picket fence, inside of which roamed a motley flock of geese, ducks, chickens, and a peacock. It was idyllic in so many ways, but, I began to have nightmares about being stabbed, or attacked with a hoe as I came in the front door, the couple who lived upstairs fought a lot, and I could hear her being beaten; he snored. I threw my shoes at the ceiling nightly in order to wake him from his drunken stupor.

2) Redondo Beach, California. I moved into a seaside, *luxury* apartment with my rich friend, Stephanie. Stephanie had closets of clothes, most of which she'd never worn. She'd say, "Oh, take something, anything, you can have it. I don't want it." Her father was the president of a

major department store chain, and paid all her store credit card bills, no problem. The apartment was really, more her style than mine, modern, with a pool around which young, attractive, single yuppies would gather to tan their hides, and gizzel margaritas. On the bright side, the apartment was spacious, and the ocean breeze was a constant. My bedroom looked out onto the Pacific, and Stephanie was rarely home to spoil it for me, away at Palm Springs most weekends. Eventually though, my commute to work became intolerable, so I moved back to Long Beach.

3) Lakewood, California. I really loved this apartment. The building was built as "war housing" during the 1940s, and still retained its 40s charm. There were many large windows, a deep "farm style" sink, and built-in shelves and bookcases. The neighborhood was a dump (as usual, as this was all I could afford), but when inside, looking out onto the trees one would never know it. It was easy to pretend I was someplace else, anyplace else but Southern California. I lived here until I moved north, away from the hellish "Southland", *never* to look back.

4) Rodeo, California. This was one of the saddest times in my life. The house I rented was on first look cheery, more than I'd hoped for, but it turned out to be sinister, tragic, filled with tears and terror. I only lived there 6 months before I moved. Frankly, I've repressed it all from memory, nor do I care to think of it now. Please forgive me, and let's move on.

5) Crockett, California. A friend of mine, Barbara, lived in the bottom apartment of this factory town bungalow, while I took the upstairs flat. Crockett was filled with flowers, light, and potential happiness. The flat was lovely, with lots of built-ins, wood, plenty of room, and my first claw-foot tub. I took lots of walks in the hills, coddled my cats, cooked, and slept. But Crockett wasn't for me. Filled with families and old people, I needed more excitement; I needed to be close to the city.

6) Emeryville, California. I think I'd been reading Tama Janowitz novels, Andy Warhol's diaries, and Edie (God I love Edie.) at the time, because I was dead set on renting a warehouse space. And boy did I. And boy, did I live the urban goddess lifestyle. My warehouse space was 1200 square feet, with enormous factory painted windows, fifteen foot ceilings, and columns to break up the space a bit. The building itself had once been the place where the suspension cables for the Golden Gate and Bay Bridge were made. Later, during WWII, the Japanese were held there before being shipped off to internment camps, far from home. We still had barbed wire fences, and gun turrets which marked each corner of the property. Across the street was a rendering plant. Huge truckloads of cattle carcasses would arrive, stiff feet stuck up in air. Down the road was Bruce's, later a hangout for our precious, arty, warehouse crowd, but heaven never lasts, and after several years of living the "high life" I knew that I had to find cheaper, and saner digs.

7) Berkeley, California. Berkeley *was* cheap, if nothing else. I lived at the corner of Adeline and Ashby, just across the border from Oakland, and a stone's throw from the Ashby BART station. My apartment, as I've noted, was cheap, and one gets what one pays for. The view out my bedroom window was onto the back of a down-at-the-heels modern apartment building, the kind where balconies are used to store forgotten ten-speeds, forlorn Weber BBQs, shapeless cardboard boxes filled with *what?* haphazardly covered with happy blue tarpaulins. The yard was overgrown and filled with sad, forgotten toys, caked in dirt, though their garish colours still shone through. I remember that I invited Frederick up after our first date, whereby he proclaimed in wonder, "Oh. You're *rich*."

8) Claremont, California. After rent control was done away with, I was forced to move yet again. I had to borrow money from Mother; it was a bad situation. Luckily for me, I found a *very*

§ **Thursday, June 3, 2003.** We traveled to the East Bay yesterday, to see Carmella. She still lives in the same beat-up Victorian, in a marginal neighborhood – Oh, the bohemian life. Her flat itself is an eclectic mix of horsehair sofas from the People's Bazaar, inherited chandeliers, '50s kitsch, and the detritus of the artist, a mix both homely and eccentric. After a brief howdydo to the cats, we made our way to Café Fanny for breakfast through the irritatingly maze-like streets of Berkeley.

Julian has already written of our day with Harriet, so there's no need for redundancy. It was a beautiful, warm day. I think we all had a good time. But in the end, there was something slightly off-putting for me about the revisiting of my past. I spent a tortured Sunday evening with visions of Annie, Carmella, and Alain frolicking horrifically through my imagination. Despite the brave but desperate attempts I made to jolly myself out of my brooding disquietude, I was later left sobbing and ranting – My fears are irrational, I know, but I will not, I can not, go back to my old life. Carmella has sought me out, nobly welcomed me back into her life, and I've grasped her hand firmly. I know now that it wasn't *her* that I wanted to desert, but my life of recklessness and unrestraint – Annie.

Carmella hasn't changed a whit. She's as beautiful, intelligent, and as stylish as ever. Her art is still as enigmatic as it is engaging, and as I've already told you, she still inhabits the same charming flat she did years ago. I'm left feeling as though no time has past, that I'd never disengaged myself from her, or our past. It's been amazingly easy to pick up where we left off, and happily so. What disturbs me though, is that I'm left feeling that I've *not really* left my past, though I know that this is an utterly irrational thought. Until Sunday, I'd not been haunted by the damnable life I'd decidedly abandoned when I nailed the lid on Annie's coffin. I left her and her madness to the devil, and I'd like it to remain so.

Since then, I've lived without friends, relying solely upon myself as well as Julian for stimulation. It feels *so* good to be me, and that means to be alone; Julian and I are as one, and are both happiest when we are alone, together. I've always been happiest this way, even as a child preferring to play alone in my pink, red and black room with door firmly shut. Why do I continue to make myself into something that I'm not? I am not a social person. I do not like to be in crowds. I hate to make small talk, to meet new people, to go to parties. I am a misanthrope. There, I've said it. What am I afraid of?

§ **Wednesday, June 4, 2003.** It *is* true that we do do the odd bit of socializing with Chines or Jamie, our best friends. I suppose what I fear most, is to enter again into a female friendship. Frankly, it terrifies me. Women intimidate and frighten me with their intense emotions. Men, in so *many* ways are so much simpler to know and to understand, to spend time with, to just *be* around. They just *aren't* as complicated, nor do they require intimacy at a breakneck pace. They are undemanding, they don't require an explanation for everything one does or says, or look for hidden motives behind *everything*. Women instinctually seek to bond, by revealing and demanding to know personal secrets and feelings best left hidden. They always want to *talk about it*, are hurt easily, and often for no damn good reason. I no longer feel that I can do this, nor do I want to. I find it to be too painful, embarrassing, unnecessary, and wearisome at my age. What is charming at 20, becomes tiresome at 30, and positively loathsome at 40.

I will tell you a secret. I don't like women, most of them anyway. I naturally gravitate towards men. I understand them. As a child I wanted to be held, cuddled, and doted on by Mother's men

I must learn to live in the moment, to really squeeze every bit of enjoyment out of life that I can. It is the only one I have, and when it's over, it's over. The void. Nothing.

It frightens me. Not death, but that I don't take advantage of life *as it is*, that I sit around belly-aching all the time, feeling contemptuous or angry, hating everything and everyone I see, disdainful and truculent about anything which doesn't fit in with my ideas of what is *right* or *wrong*, *appropriate* or *not*. The fact is, is that this universe, is not *my* universe (has it ever been?) I feel more and more distant with respect to popular culture, to *the kids* and what they are interested in, and since American culture worships youth, I end up feeling alienated, finding myself longing for a world that doesn't exist, could never exist, has never existed.

§ Friday, May 30, 2003. Julian and I have built a world, a universe of our own within these four walls, we've decorated it lovingly with our favorite objects, meaningful books, comfortable furniture, lavish accoutrements. When we're at home, the outside disappears, we could be anywhere. For better or for worse, it's an ideal environment for dreaming and for fantasy. Much to my discomfiture, I find myself thinking of other places, other apartments I could be living in, a bungalow in Lawrence with an Italian styled garden and a large chestnut tree in the front yard, Greenwich Village flats with Victorian moldings, seaside villas on the Riviera, decayed mansions in New Orleans, *petit* palazzos in Rome, and of course, Parisian apartments in St-Germain-des-Près.

My dream apartment in Paris is on place St-Sulpice. It is on the second floor of an 18th-century building, with tiny, wrought iron balconies which look out onto the square, its fountain, and *l'égglise*. The entry way is dark and cool, there are worn marble stairs which lead to our front door, substantial, with a large brass knob set dead centre. There are two bedrooms, a large salon, an eat-in kitchen, and a large *salle de bain*. Our bedroom looks out onto the courtyard of our building, where there are several large chestnut trees; a sea of green leaves where birds squabble pleasantly. The windows are tall, and open to let in cool breezes on hot summer days, the leaves making a rustling sound, the light filtering through them onto the squeaky, worn parquet floors. Our living room, the salon, is large, and there is an old, and elaborate fireplace in one corner, a large foggy mirror atop. As the salon is on the corner of the building, it has many large windows which when open create a gentle cross breeze. The draperies are green damask, French green, a very elusive colour anyplace but in France, don't you know?

Our second bedroom, where you, our guest, may stay, doubles as the library and office. Do you like our book collection? We've 5,000 volumes of literature, French history, and art. Do feel free to peruse as you'd like. The desk is Art Deco and came from a little shop off the place des Voages. The Englishwoman who runs it is a little difficult, but she did give us a fine deal. But darling, have you ever had to drive a moving van through these narrow streets? The bathroom is here, between the two bedrooms. We're lucky to have such a large window in here, and we've put the tub underneath so as to take advantage of the view onto the courtyard while we bathe – It's ever so relaxing. I sometimes spend whole afternoons in here. And finally, the kitchen. The floors are hexagon marble tiles, very typical in a building of this age. I won't be cooking this evening, as I didn't have a chance to get to the marché bio this morning at bd. Raspail. Would you care to go to Au Bon St-Pourçain? It's just around the corner on rue Servandoni. I'll be having the *poulet estragon*, *et toi?*

inexpensive *in-law* apartment in the Oakland hills, in a district called Claremont. I had a huge deck, built around old pine trees. There were squirrels and blue jays, racoon and opossum. By this time, I'd decided to go back to school, to end my dreary career as a refinery chemist, to do something more *me*. So while it was small, and out of the way (I couldn't walk out my door and be somewhere), I *could* save for graduate school. When I heard I'd be moving to Austin to attend University of Texas I cried, but as it turned out, it would be the best thing that'd ever happened to me – Julian.

9) Austin, Texas. I arrived in Austin on the 4th of July. I'd arranged for a small, inexpensive studio just off campus in a 1930s era building, no small feat, as older apartments with charm in Austin were extremely difficult to find. Despite the heat, I loved my little studio, but what I hadn't known when I'd arranged to rent it during school recess, was that it was smack in the midst of the infamous neighborhood known as *West Campus*, i.e. fraternity row. At the time, I'd thought, "Gee, what a nice neighborhood, full of grand old homes, and it's so *quiet*." Julian and I met that first fall in graduate school; we were both enrolled in the same program. He moved in that same November. We conspired together to get even with the *frat guys* and *sorority girls* every night. Alas, they got the best of us, and we were virtually driven from Austin.

10) Lansdowne, Pennsylvania. I'd always romanticized the East Coast. I pictured lots of tweedy types with elbow patches, smoking pipes and discussing literature, very *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, if you know what I mean? ARGH. The reality. Guys like Ted, who listened to the police scanner in their spare time, who liked to "go out on the boat" weekends at Roloboth Beach, who drove a Dodge Viper, and sounded like Rocky Balboa. And then, there were the women with *smoker's face*, the supermarkets with impressive chip, pretzel and soda aisles, but rotting produce. Scary, scary, unbelievable neighborhoods, like West Philadelphia, where burned up, or burning cars on the streets were so common as to be rendered unremarkable. Julian had gone out ahead, alone, to find us an apartment. After he'd carried me across the threshold, after I'd seen the apartment, I burst into tears, but it wasn't *really* as bad as all that. I *was* overwrought after a four-day, white-knuckle, cross-country drive in a U-Haul, towing Julian's old CRX, the cats inside, their silent meows pitiful and painful for me to bear. The bathroom was the loveliest I've had. And the apartment *was* unusually large. But our neighbors were dicey, the hallways were dark and dirty, and our landlord liked to make himself at home in our apartment when we weren't there (we found his hat on our couch one day, and another, his wallet stuffed full with hundreds of credit cards – we returned it.) No, the East wasn't at all what I had expected it to be, and despite my cushy, dreamy museum job, I longed to go back West.

11) Yuba City, California. Yuba City was an oasis in bloom when we arrived, mid-March, the strawberries already being sold at roadside stands, the air mild and fragrant with spring sunshine. We rented a garden apartment close to the library where Julian worked, and though rather like the kind of place your grandparents might live, built in the 1960s, it was very well maintained and had a certain retro charm. There was a pool, there were tennis courts, and we threw ourselves into the *Sunset Magazine* lifestyle, with gusto, patio BBQs and evening swims, dolled up in our retro bathing suits, cocktails in hand. We decorated our apartment with 50s styled furniture, with bits we'd find on weekend drives to Oroville, Chico, or Paradise. We trolled every antique store from Red Bluff to Fresno for Franciscan Starburst and 1950s-era *cowboy* kitsch, but after several months of reality, e.g. commuting to Sacramento to work on a two lane *blood highway*, I felt that we had to leave, that our future was not Yuba City. We needed to be close to our friends, we needed more excitement, I needed to nullify my commute. What we needed, was San Francisco.

12) Page Street, San Francisco, California. Julian found this apartment, a modern, 1960s building on Page street near Baker. Our 50s-era furniture looked swell, and we had some wonderful, crazy *Ulm Lounge* styled parties. We even bought a '59 Cadillac to go with our swanky big-city lifestyle. Our view was of the Golden Gate Park panhandle, but if you stood in the southeast corner of our bedroom and peered out the window, on tip-toe, you could see the very top of the Golden Gate Bridge. We hadn't planned to move, but when Dean told us he was leaving his Sutter Street apartment downtown, for Twin Peaks, though we knew we'd have to sell the Cadillac with no garage to house it, we leapt at the opportunity.

13) Sutter Street, San Francisco, California. Ah! Sutter Street. I still remember it fondly. It was there that we traded in our 50s life for the 30s version. It was there that we really got to *know* San Francisco. And we were living there when we took our first trip to Paris *ensemble*. We lived on the top floor, on the southeast corner. There were sweeping views, cross-ventilation, a separate bedroom, and there was a window in the bathroom (you apartment dwellers understand this whole window in the bathroom thing, right?) We had two *large* walk-in closets, and we had beautiful hardwood floors – It was a *very* nice apartment. So why did we leave? I ask myself all the time. Why, why, why???

13) McAllister Street, San Francisco, California. Percy alerted us to a very reasonably priced flat at his friend Mrs. Roper's house, so we took it (although I recognize that he didn't *force* us to move there, I never really forgave him for this *recommendation*.) Not content with what we had (and it was a lot for San Francisco), we were thrilled (at first) to have an entire *flat* at our disposal. Did the Baptist church next door worry us? No. Did the proximity to the Western Addition projects make us nervous? Not at all. Did the dark and gloomy atmosphere of creepy Mrs. Roper's building bother us? Nope. How about the mold in the closets? The 70s-era orange and "harvest gold" kitchen? The ominously stained carpet in the hallway? No. And did I mention the homeless shelter? We lived there for two months.

14) Geary Street, San Francisco, California. Broke, tired, defeated, in debt, we retreated, tails between legs, to a 400 square foot studio in the theatre district, on lathsome Geary Street. Five floors above a parking lot, facing the Blue Lamp, there was the constant din of the 38 bus, car horns, sirens, late night revelers, music blaring from the Blue Lamp, drums in the alley, the whistling valet, car alarms, &c. But we had a mission, and that mission was to live as cheaply as possible (at \$1325/month!), work as much as possible, pay bills, and save for a condo, an apartment of our own. And we'd never thought it would be possible here, in San Francisco, where the median price of a house is well over \$400,000, but one day, while walking home on O'Farrell, we passed a 21-story art deco high-rise that we'd often speculated about when living on Sutter (when we had a view). Was it an office building? A hotel? An apartment building? We asked a gentleman standing out front, and he told us it was condominiums, he was soon to be selling his, and would we like to take a peek? This my friend, was the seed which led to our current domicile.

§ **Wednesday, May 28, 2003.** Our building, the first condo-conversion in California (1961), was built in 1929. An Art Deco meets Mediterranean styled high rise, it was once one of the nicest apartment hotels in San Francisco. Actors from the nearby theatre district would live here while their show was in town. Rumor even has it that Lauren Bacall lived here awhile, as did some other well-known stars. While the building is primarily studios, there are some one-bedrooms, six highly coveted terrace units on the 16th floor, and the three million dollar penthouse up top. I

won't lie to you. The reason we're living here is that it was the only thing we could afford, *and* that we liked. But we wouldn't be living here if we didn't like it, and we are very picky. We've large windows, a view of downtown and the bay, our bathroom is tiled in the original Art Deco style, and our walls are Mediterranean plaster – Though it's small, it does have atmosphere and style galore.

We were lucky to get our unit. It was a probate sale, and it sold for under market value. Tom, the previous owner, had committed suicide, throwing himself out the window, clutching his little dog Daisy as he fell. There aren't many people who want to buy this sort of lingering legacy. But it didn't stop us from gutting the place and starting afresh. I think that Tom is happy, his ghost never appears, I've not thought about him until now, as I write this.

So now we're homeowners, and I often wonder if it's all it's cracked up to be, but I will say that it's put the kibosh on our itchy feet. Although we always *feel* like moving, we can't. Once you buy a place, that's it. If you want to move, you're obligated to buy something else, and there is nothing else *in* San Francisco that we could afford to buy, *and* want to live in. What we *want* doesn't always correspond to what we have. Regardless, we're stuck here with our investment, and that's that. But it's not as dire as I've portrayed it. Far from it. It's a very nice, but little place, 550 square feet, a salon, a kitchen, a *sleeping alcove*, a dressing room, and the windowless Art Deco bathroom. There are two tiny closets crammed with too many things – It's time for a spring cleaning. Ultimately, it does keep one from accumulating too much *stuff*. I keep telling myself, and anyone who'll listen, that we're living *à la Parisian*. And we *are* close to everything, public transportation, Whole Foods market, Union Square; it's the urban lifestyle, and I like it save for the noise.

The noise, the noise, the noise. Always there is the incessant noise. The playground behind us, the 38 grunting down O'Farrell, the car alarms at midnight, the screaming, moaning puns, the Harts, the taxi horns, it's all around us, constantly. We've thought of moving to a quiet mid-western town like Lawrence, Kansas, but with our track record, I wonder if this is wise? Another life, another reality always seems preferable no matter *what* our situation. I wonder if it's not wiser to stay here and create our own, happy reality, based in reality, if that is at all possible?

§ **Thursday, May 29, 2003.** I made a pot of tea this morning, and am considering what I've written for the last few days, how I can't seem to settle down, how another life always seems preferable to mine. And yet, when I read Julian's Journals, I feel that our lives sound glamorous, and picture myself as an outsider, reading them, and wanting to live this sort of life. Is this normal? Does everyone do this? Is there anyone who is happy, contented in the here and now, who isn't planning for the future, thinking always of the future, deferring to the future his happiness, *his life*?

It's so important to live in the moment. I mean, I know that one must plan for the future, one can't be a grasshopper, but one shouldn't be 100

I also wonder if I set myself goals, if only to have something to concentrate on, so as not to be alone with my thoughts? So as not to be faced with the alien feelings and activities which comprise *normal* life? Do I know how to enjoy a *normal* life? To delight in the little things? Like shopping for produce, enjoying a good soak, just staring out the window and doing nothing? I feel like I could be dead at anytime, I could be hit by a speeding SUV on my way to Whole Foods later today, or I could be killed by a crazed commuter with a gun on Caltrain tomorrow morning.

§ **Tuesday, July 22, 2003.** Julian and I both had appointments this morning with Dr. Wu. We purposely make our appointments one after the other, first thing in the morning so that we can go together. Somehow, this makes dentistry more bearable. Dr. Wu's office is way across town in the Outer Sunset and getting there is an ordeal if we take the bus; an hour's trip at the very least. Dr. Wu isn't a *bad* dentist, and I do enjoy Shirley, but the *smooth jazz* is always turned up too loudly in the waiting room so that one is unable to read. And then, Dr. Wu's techniques are somewhat bizarre. Do you know, he filled a cavity of mine once using no novocaine? It was *not pleasant*.

This morning's entertainment? Teeth cleaning all around. Julian went first while I sat in the waiting room, thumping through *People*, grimacing at the blaring Kenny G. and George Benson's "This Masquerade", the "Hotel California" of hokey *smooth jazz* stations nationwide. I sat there, feeling more and more stressed by this dreadful racket. I have, in past, asked Shirley to turn it down a notch, but Shirley was nowhere to be seen. I tried to block out the din by putting tissues in my ears. I searched the room for the hi-fi. And then it occurred to me, that if I could find the wiring for the waiting room speakers, maybe I could disconnect them. I followed the wiring from the speaker to a small box near the front door. It was a non-descript black box with no manner of identification, no indication that it was indeed a part of the hi-fi electronics, but there was an on/off button, and a min/max knob. Ah ha. While I wasn't quite brave enough to push the button to the "off" position, I was emboldened enough by my irritation at the *quiet storm* to play with the min/max knob. Slowly, I turned the knob to "min." The front door floor mat bell began to ring repeatedly. I quickly turned it back to "max," dashed to my seat, and awkwardly flipped to an article on Paris and Nicky Hilton. Moments later a visibly annoyed Dr. Wu appeared.

"Did someone come in?"

"No."

"Did you go out?"

"No."

"Did you hear the bell ring?"

"Yes, ... but no one has come in."

"Are you sure? Are you *joking* with me?"

"No Dr. Wu, I'm not joking with you ... Dr. Wu?"

"Yes?"

"Could you turn the *smooth jazz* down, just a notch?"

§ **Wednesday, July 23, 2003.** *The Adventures of Antoine Doinel* set is over. We finished it last night. We've watched everything, every interview, every commentary, every bit of Léaud we could squeeze out of this boxed set. It's a little depressing, but to appease ourselves we've brought home Eustache's masterpiece *The Mother and the Whore* for a second viewing – Léaud's finest performance, a perfect film, the dialog magnificent, the humor delightfully dark. The back cover of the video box is covered with superlatives, "Brilliant," "Astounding," "Marvelous," and this film lives up to them all (for once.) It is certainly one of my favorite films, and while more powerful than Rohmer's *Full Moon in Paris*, *Full Moon in Paris* still remains at the top of my list, perhaps because it is the story of a young woman, and not that of a man.

tan calf-skin "cut-out", low-heeled, pointy-toed Mary Janes. Perfect for summer and into autumn. Our purchases will be ready Thursday; my shoes are to be soled with non-slip rubber, while the pants are to be hemmed and cuffed by the little elves upstairs.

§ **Wednesday, June 18, 2003.** Am I the only person at the office who is not a little upset about our move? Mr. Parent announced in our morning meeting that I should see about getting a prescription for Xanax. Everyone turned in their chairs towards me and died laughing. Later, same meeting (why don't I know *when* to draw the line?), I asked why I hadn't heard back from the "colour committee" after volunteering to help design the new office's decor. "I asked Duke if he didn't need you, and he said that no, he didn't. He only needs Binky." So *that's it*. Bloody Duke Winthrop, and his *committee of two*. Who's ever heard of a *committee of two*?

Ever since Percy died Duke and I are *off* each other. Admittedly, he's tried to warm up to me, but the truth is, is that I don't like him one bit – He's mean you see, and I've washed my hands of him. I'm sure that while Percy was alive he only put up with us because we were Percy's friends, and I suppose that we only put up with Duke because *he* was Percy's significant other. He's never liked us, nor did he ever pretend to. He was bored stiff by our company. Or *something*.

But that's not to say that I didn't try to charm him. I did, and earnestly so. I chatted him up, the fence post that he is, and I gave him a lovely birthday present one year – a "36" string of 1930s ceramic beads. They were very unusual, and not in the least cheap. Duke dabbles with jewelry-making, so I thought he could use them for his hideous *creations*, and if not, wear them as is. Wouldn't you know, he graciously reciprocated at my birthday, with a pair of his tacky, cheap earrings. I weakly feigned delight for Percy's sake, and gave up on Duke forever.

No doubt, Duke and Binky will come up with some smashingly clever colour scheme, and be roundly congratulated and applauded after we move. "Oh Duke and Binky. Aren't you so exquisitely clever? Aren't we so very lucky that *you* work here, because otherwise, we'd be living with an innocuous neutral grey instead of this vomitously mauve and aqua." I sat there gritting my teeth considering this future spectacle, meanwhile, Bill Anderson, wanting to keep the the jokes ball rolling snidely piped, "They probably didn't want you because you'd want it to be all *black*." Howls of laughter. After the meeting, I called Julian and burst into tears.

§ **Thursday, June 19, 2003.** On our way to office, we stopped off at Wilkes-Bashford to pick up our prizes. On inspection, Julian was dismayed to discover that his pants had been pressed with knife-edged creases. Is this standard procedure we wondered? Do men *really* wear creased pants? Creases are so, well, so *dorky*. I've reassured Julian that I can indeed get the creases out with a bit of steam, a hot iron, and some elbow grease, so not to panic. My shoes on the other hand are perfect and need not a bit of work. They are to *die for*. I can't wait to wear them.

§ **Friday, June 20, 2003.** Julian has left for a conference this morning. He flies first to Cleveland, then connects to Toronto on one of those teeny, terrifying commuter planes (He later called me to let me know it was filled with other librarians, fearfully clutching their Elsevier and OCLC bags as they careened through the Midwestern sky.) Following the meeting, he'll be off to

visit his father, step-mother, and half-brothers in Hamburg. As usual, I've been invited to go, but have declined.

I've a week *alone!* You've no idea how wonderful it is to have time alone when one spends the rest of the year in a small studio apartment with one's spouse and a couple of cats. It's one of life's little luxuries. Don't get me wrong, I adore Julian, I *LOVE* Julian. I can't live with out Julian, but I *love* to be alone. Being alone is not the same as being lonely.

The office treated us to pizza and soda for lunch today. My office is two steps from the break room, so I was suckered into this *prole-fête* despite my best intentions to forego its dubious pleasures – it's the cheese fumes, I guess.

The office *does* try to make it as *nice* as they're able, though in their typically obnoxious way. How, you might ask? What's wrong with free pizza, you're thinking? Why is this gesture so obnoxious? Well, I'll tell you – they only order bizarre, I mean, *gourmet* pizza, which no one in his right mind would propose even as a joke. Might I interest you in some *orange-ped* pizza? How about *artichoke and lamb* pizza? There's never, ever, any regular pizza. You know, as in garden variety cheese pizza. Oh no, that would be too *common* for our office. We're too *sophisticated* for *that*. I once politely asked if they wouldn't include a regular pizza or two for the jejune minority. They ignored me, of course. They always do – I'm just some *little* person who does something unimportant downstairs, somewhere (What *do* you *do* anyway?), who wears too much black and dresses too nicely (You look like you're going to a cocktail party. Do you sleep in a coffin?), and cries in her nicely decorated lamp-lit office (Can you *see* in here? Where'da get this poster? How much did it cost? Can I have it if you don't want it anymore?)

I chose a slab from the least offensive pie – chicken breast and caper – and scurried back to my office as quickly as possible, hopefully not seeming *too* anti-social. Meanwhile, everyone gathered round conference tables, sitting in cushy aqua office chairs under mega-watt fluorescent lights, eating daintily from paper plates, drinking Cokes, joking, chatting, "pounding" with one-another, acting normal, being *congenial*. Is this what's expected of one at work? Am I totally blowing it by not plastering a smile on my face and "making nice" with these, these *people*? Why can't I just be happy and normal like the others?

Why *can't* I just fit in? This shouldn't be such a silly ordeal, but is it my fault? I swear to you, these *congenial* people drive me to it. Listen to this, will you? While waiting with everyone else, pre-pizza, paper plate in hand, trying to blend in [like a wolf in sheep's clothing], Buffy, Polyantha extraordinaire, turned to me and said *con forza*, "What cute shoes." Of course, everyone turned to look at my hideous blue bargain-bin trainers. I can assure you, that normally, I don't wear trainers. I hate trainers of any kind. I think they are horrid, and a blight to one's person. I'm sure that the fact that I *was* wearing trainers, was what made her do what she did – Lucie in trainers is remarkable.

She must have realized that she'd made some sort of *faux pas*, what, with all those *people* staring and pointing and gaping at me, because she blurted, "Well hey everybody. Look at my shoes. They look terrible. These are my *gardening shoes*." A fancy bit of back-peddling if I do say so myself. Luckily for us all, at this, the high point of a uniquely spectacular display of graceless social intercourse, we were invited to lunge at the pizzas; relievedly so.

It is very difficult for me to interact with normal, well-meaning people. Buffy *was* well-meaning, wasn't she? Of course she was. She may be dense, but she's not malicious. All the same, I find friendly enthusiasm like this to be painful and uncomfortable. I never quite know what to do

up for a picnic, ain't cha? At yew slur you'd be comfy in that?" I must keep this all in mind so as not to suffer too greatly after my *bubble* has been popped.

Picnics high and low. It all depends upon what yer used ta, don't it? I threw a fine Edwardian picnic once at Sutor Park. We played croquet and badminton, ate roasted chicken, drank pretty wines. Julian climbed into a fir tree and quoted Baudelaire in French. I perched coquettishly on a blanket, lace parasol in hand, wide-brimmed hat on head, greeting our stylishly garbed guests, I was *très élégant*. And while I know better than to show up to a public festival with so anachronistic a look, I would like to make it as pleasing and as distinguished a picnic as could possibly be managed, given the rusticity of the event. I don't want to stand out from the crowd. As you know, I detest being looked at, but we will be noticed. Why? Because we won't carry an igloo full of microbrew, because we won't be slouched in aluminum beach chairs, and because we won't be wearing the *de rigueur* uniform of Teva sport sandals, Gap "cargo" shorts, baseball cap, and logo'd t-shirt. Nay. I will wear my ecru lace dress, my broad brimmed hat, and my beribboned espadrilles. We'll sit on our red cabbage rosed quilts, our picnic basket near to hand. We'll sip clear red wine and nibble on *amuses-bouches*. We will be beacons of good taste, connoisseurs of the cult of coult.

§ Friday, July 18, 2003. Julian and I arose this morning at six, groaning and chitching our heads. What an ordeal it is to go to the East Bay. I was happy to have seen Aki Kaurismäki's silent film *Juha*, and to have stuffed myself silly at Pasand's last evening, but was it worth the effort? Survey says, no. We were also disappointed that Carmella and Guy couldn't make it, again. Chimes was all set to meet us at Pasand's for dinner, but he never showed up – his electronic invitation was jettisoned into the virtual *poubelle* by a "spam filter" looking for "entertainment" in the subject line. How tiresome.

Julian has announced that we *must* get out of our commitment for Sunday with the Cools. I feel so ambivalent. On the one hand, I *really do* want to get out more, and I *do* want to give them a fair chance. On the other, I know that Sunday will be yet another difficulty, not unlike yesterday. Jeffrey has already admitted that Sharon really doesn't want to go, "She doesn't like music", and when I brought up the subject of a picnic lunch, he dismissed me with a wave of his hand and an irritable note in his voice, "Sharon's just going to make some sandwiches or something. We don't do this sort of thing very well." *Why am I doing this?* He seems so ill-humoured about the whole thing. Maybe, like me, he's only doing this because *he* feels he should. *Are we both half-heartedly playing at socializing?*

§ Saturday, July 19, 2003. I've sent a message to Jeffrey Cool telling him that we won't be able to go to the festival Sunday. That we just *cannot* face the crowd, that we've been *terribly busy* lately, and that we're in need of a *well-earned rest* this weekend. I don't think he's happy. I've admitted to her that I'm a terrible person. She has agreed. But what difference does it make?

It's true though, we *must* stay home to recover from our various traumas this week. We'll put out the picnic we'd created for the festival, and settle in for a day of *The Adventures of Antoine Doinel*. How I rue the moment we've finished with this precious boxed set.

Cosmetic manufacturers use “French” sounding, if not actual French, wording on packaging to give their products more cachet. Women clamour for the secrets of “French” skincare (Somehow, they have it in their minds that French women have skin which is more beautiful than any in the world. I’d be willing to bet that most of these women have not actually been to France, to see the degree to which these French women bake themselves in the sun every summer – and it shows. These “French” skin creams are obviously *not* performing miracles *en France*.) We Americans, rather we Anglo-Saxons, after romanticizing the French for centuries as superiorly chic, cultured, and civilized, have created a legend, a myth, a symbol of elegance and sophistication larger than life. We defer to their expertise, because it is their expertise that we have always deferred to – we believe in France as one would believe in a deity. The word “French” has become abstract, diluted, a word which could I give it meaning it would be:

french *adj.* 1. Of a higher nature or kind; of great value or excellence; extraordinary. 2. Characterized by or exhibiting refined, tasteful beauty of manner, form, or style.

And then, there *are* people who have what I like to call “French” characteristics, who are interested in *la présentation, civilité, bien-être*. We perhaps had European parents who, though they weren’t French, took a classically European view nonetheless in child rearing, endowing us with a belief system which has much in common with the French way of life.

Or is it a question of socio-economics, i.e. “class”, as many would suspect, and not without reason? Are the proletariat so busy scrambling to survive, working multiple jobs that they’ve no time to devote to this foolish nonsense, this *joie de vivre*?

Nurture must certainly have something to do with a “French” outlook regardless of one’s genetic origins. My mother certainly isn’t *continental*, and her ancestors were members of the original Plymouth gang. Nonetheless, she *is* very European in spirit, very *olde worlde* when it comes to the basics: values, morals, traditions, family. Father on the other hand, a composer, an artist, the oldest son from a family of rich eccentrics and n’er-do-wells, *was* continental. Father’s intellectualism, artistry, snobbism, and leftist leanings along with Mother’s common sense, frankly speaking, *things must be done well, or not done at all* attitudes are all evident in me, were all *nurtured* in me.

This sum total has ultimately lead to my love of France, of the French people. These conflicting traits within myself, my way of thinking and of viewing the world is, in fact, something that I have in common with the French – my essence, my soul resonates more clearly and more strongly with them than it does with my own culture; when I am in France, I feel like I am at home. I’ve grown up in a country which, despite its spats and political rubbish, idolizes France, where “French” products have a unique cachet, where they are seen as superior. Where anything, when associated with France, be it food, decorating, dress, or entertainment, is given an immediate leg up in the distinction and quality departments. France is my indulgent uncle, my impossibly sophisticated aunt. It is like a dim but still powerful memory of a life once lived that I can still vaguely recall.

§ Thursday, July 17, 2003. I’ve gone off to Whole Foods today to find items for our dreaded Sunday picnic in Stern Grove. When it comes to picnics, I’ve always grand ideas which wouldn’t lend themselves well to picnicking *en mass* with hundreds: fancy lawn umbrellas, croquet, iced champagne, caviar on toast, tea length dresses and linen suits, a wind-up victrola, poetry, and a tiered lemon cake. Sunday morning, Jeffrey Cool will say, undoubtedly, “Ew, yer awfully dressed

when someone, especially a relative stranger like Buffy, focuses on *me*, what I’m wearing or what I’m doing. I’ve always told Julian, that if I were ever to be in a rock band, I’d be forced to play with my back to the audience while hovering near the back of the stage. I simply couldn’t face all those *staring empty expectant faces*.

§ Saturday, June 21, 2003. The first day of summer. I’ve just finished my lunch after spending the morning at the farmer’s market with Jamie. It was hot and bright, and I’d forgotten to bring my sun hat. It’s terrible to be as sensitive to the sun as I am. What a burden. But despite the horrid, evil sun, I was brave and victorious – I came home with tiny French radishes, apricots, beets, large dried Italian beans, fennel, tomatoes, Swiss chard, tiny strawberries, green beans, tiny fingerling potatoes, and a big bunch of sunflowers.

I sometimes wonder if I don’t bore Jamie. I socialize so very rarely, and when I do, it’s oft times awkward; my conversation seems dull and tiresome to my own ears, so I assume to those of my guests as well. Since I don’t live too glamorous a life, I’ve nothing particularly interesting to discuss, save my ideas and opinions on the latest book I’ve read. And most of these concern France, sociology, or both. I’m sure that I must be a bit of a bore constantly talking about the same old things. I sometimes ask myself, wouldn’t it be easier to not socialize at all, than to later agonize over what I did or didn’t say? I hope that Jamie was merely preoccupied this morning rather than dreading that he’d made a date with me.

Our building is holding a garage sale today, a “patio sale.” Several weeks ago we cleared and cleaned our closets (all two of them), even under the beds, but despite our best efforts, we couldn’t muster up enough junk to make a go of it at the “patio sale.” As I sit here writing I can hear the rustle of pink plastic bags (*pink* plastic bags are always rustling for some reason, that’s how I know, though I can’t see them, that they’re pink), men moving furniture, children screeching, and a demonstration involving a boom-box and Hall & Oates.

Early this morning, while waiting to meet Jamie, I spied poor old Bud heading towards the patio looking dapper and optimistic, sporting his turquoise bolo tie and brown, Western-style polyester suit, his pockets stuffed with money no doubt. I suppose for him, this is a *huge* social event. It must be difficult to be 85 and alone, an oil painting of Barbara Stanwyck your only companion.

§ Tuesday, June 24, 2003. I had a late morning appointment with Arthur at Artists and Poets. I warm up to Arthur more and more. My initial reserve with him is fading away as I realize that he’s not just another chatty beautician. Today he confessed to me that he hates small talk. Like me, he has a dual personality; he shuns parties and any other social engagement where he’d have to be *on*. I wonder if he handles it better than I? But then again, I don’t work with the public. How is it he keeps his cool day after day? He’s such an inspiration to me.

I was supposed to go in to the office this afternoon, but couldn’t muster up the courage. I dread going, and especially by myself – The pushing and shoving, pink plastic bag carrying Chinese ladies at the MUNI station, and the drunks on the train. The interminable crowded elevator ride with stops on every floor between A and I. Stanley’s incessant complaining and never-ending nonsensical emails about what he’s working on (Who cares?) Chastity’s racket (Thank God she’s on vacation this week.) Herbert’s sullen silence. And then, of course, there’s the mind-numbing work.

Feeling aimless and bored, I thought I'd do some shopping instead. Do I have to tell you that an aimless and bored woman makes for high-risk shopping? First stop, Neiman Marcus. Two hours and two handbags later (An Art Deco inspired Badgley Mischka evening bag and an R & Y Augusti which could double as the handbag carried by Anais Nin in the final scene of *Henry 8th June* – My *ultimate* handbag by the way), I was back onto the street and heading for home with my prizes *and* my dignity. I'm glad I know when to end a good thing before it goes bad.

§ **Wednesday, June 25, 2003.** I arrived at the office this morning to find a seating chart for our new cubicles on my chair. I casually looked at it while booting up my computer – would I be seated near Karen Holbean? Or would I be flanked by the ill-humored, loud-talker Juan Ramirez and the equally loud-talking, half-witted Leon Wong? Dear reader, it was worse than that. My cube, is the only *weird* cube of the bunch. Everyone else's cube has four sides and a doorway. Everyone else has a *normal* cube. Mine, on the other hand, has three sides; I'm open to scrutiny by the world. But it doesn't stop there, oh no sir-ee. My cube has been configured so that I will be sitting with my *back* to the doorway, make that *gaping* doorway. Did I hear you ask, "So what?" Ponder for a moment sitting in a cube with three sides, your back to the opening, and your computer monitor facing all mankind. Now, *you tell me* what the problem is with *that* scenario. If you can't, you shouldn't be logged in *here* my friend.

Incensed, *outraged*, I showed the first office-mate I could find the offensive document. As luck would have it, it was Jeffrey Cool (When will I *ever* learn?) "Did you notice anything funny about my cubicle?" "Oh, they'll change that. They can change that. They won't leave it like that. Don't make such a big deal about it." "Oh yeah? well let's trade then, since this isn't *such a big deal*." He agreed, but Mr. Parent later said that we can't trade cubicles. Is he only trying to aggravate me? I keep asking myself, why is it, that of thirty-two people, it is *me* who has been assigned the *weird* cubicle.

§ **Thursday, June 26, 2003.** I spent a ghastly night last night, covered by a lukewarm, damp towel, trying to sleep. It's been beastly hot these last few days, each day hotter than the last. If Julian were home he'd absolutely die. There's no breeze, no relief in sight. *Patate* to those who don't believe the globe is warming.

Our apartment is like an oven, long and rectangular with windows at one end. The building is made of reinforced steel and concrete, fine heat conductors; our apartment on a hot day is always 10 degrees warmer inside than out. 91 degrees in San Francisco today; 101 in our apartment-cum-oven.

Got email from Jeffrey today suggesting we "pop over" Sunday afternoon, then head to The Buccaneer. We're busy, but I've asked if she can reschedule us for next weekend. The more I consider it, the more I'm looking forward to this odd bar jaunt. Will there be pirate types there? Is there pirate memorabilia? Pirate drinks? Will the bartender wear an eye patch and say, "Will ye be drinkin' grog matey?" If I order a champagne cocktail will I be called a landlubber and be made to walk the plank?

I returned home from the office hot and tired, to find Mr. Darcy sleeping in the bathroom sink, and poor little Miss Moppet sprawled on the bathroom floor – poor creatures. Joy pop in mouth, I stripped off my clothes, collapsed on the couch, and switched on Turner Classic Movies to find an Indian film being screened. Up 'til now, I've avoided these *Thursday night, Month of June*

I've also undergone the online Personality Disorder Test which indicates that I'm a paranoid, histrionic narcissist. Oh dear.

Table 4:

Disorder	Rating
Paranoid:	Very High
Schizoid:	Moderate
Schizotypal:	Moderate
Antisocial:	High
Borderline:	Moderate
Histrionic:	Very High
Narcissistic:	Very High
Avoidant:	High
Dependent:	High
Obsessive-Compulsive:	Low

§ **Monday, July 14, 2003.** Bastille Day: La Fête Nationale. As I write this scrawl, I picture people all 'round France, eating, drinking, dancing, *faire l'amour*, enjoying the fireworks, and celebrating the marvel, the miracle of their country.

If you're like me, you're constantly studying the French; every expression, behaviour, quirk, gesture, manner of dress; it *all* fascinates me to no end – I am an ardent scientist. The French never fail to charm me, their lifestyle seems ideal, their taste above reproach, their attitudes, interests, humanity, civility, *en fait – tout*; they are my cultural ideal, my inspiration, the measuring stick by which I judge my self. A friend asked me recently, "Is what you hold dear about the French, what you see as uniquely French qualities, mere personality variability? Much of what you've identified as being "French" character traits, can apply just as well to people who aren't French, and furthermore, who haven't the slightest interest in France. Is what you love about the French *really* intrinsically French? Or is what you're enamoured with, only a life well lived, and one which could be lived by anyone, anywhere?" But aren't the French responsible for *jolie de vivre? Sanior faire?* Are there equivalent phrases in other languages? Haven't they always been the *professeurs* teaching us, the bumbling freshmen boobs, what it is, *the art of how to live?*

Of all the peoples in the world, the French are associated above all with a civilized lifestyle, and I'm sure there is a reason for this. While it's true that the same characteristics that we think of as "French" could embody the European attitude in general, one must admit that the term "Germanophilia" just isn't very common (Does the word even exist?) The French have been iconized, and any aspect of living well, whether it exists or originates from another land, is inevitably categorized as "French."

France, and especially Paris, has taken on a meaning above and beyond its reality. The words "French" or "Paris" conjure up images in people's minds: "luxury," "sophistication," "good taste," "good living," "sexy." Ask any Frenchman what he thinks of this, and he will shrug, baffled, for *bien sûr mes amis*, shopping centres, junk food, chain stores, supermarkets, and housing developments exist in much of France, too. Even so, across the channel, across the Atlantic, any product which features an Eiffel Tower, or other "French" talisman, will fly off the shelves.

2. Take a philosophical approach to the annoyances of life, or perhaps develop a thicker shell which will help me to filter out the static of shuffling feet, gun-snacking, rap-blasting – in short, all modern horrors. I should like to have a more generous, humanistic outlook towards my fellow man and his foibles; the “Gallic shrug” approach if you will.

3. My appearance could use an overhaul. I badly need a haircut, and my adipose (30 lbs.) is a nuisance which *I am* working on – slowly, but successfully. (What a bore that *I* detest exercising.) While my appearance is quite *normal* by American standards, I feel like a *hog* when in Europe, especially when squeezing between tables in a café. It’s a *little* embarrassing, and something that *must* be remedied. I should also like to “fix” my hair mornings instead of putting it up with a clip and running out the door a disheveled mess. Of course, a good haircut would settle this account – When will my copy of *Art Deco Hair: Hairstyles of the 1920s and 1930s* arrive?

4. It is vital that I minimize, if not obliterate my dichotomous, American beliefs and values, seeing things as “good” or “bad.” When I indulge, in food, drink, sex, e.g. any of the puritan, American “sins,” I berate myself and feel guilty. In France, as in most other cultures, this dichotomy does not exist. The French do not *feel* guilt over the pleasures of the flesh, nor do they recognize such pleasures as sinful.

5. Learn how to keep my mouth shut and keep a low profile. I need to maintain a cordial emotional distance from people who are *not* my friends nor family; they’ve no business knowing my personal affairs. I need to refrain from revealing too much – about my personal life, my feelings, my health, my history. Trust is something to be earned and not *given away*.

6. I would like to build stronger connexions, to *really cultivate* relationships with the people who mean most to me – friends old and new, as well as my family. I need to learn how to earnestly devote myself to these relationships while still retaining boundaries, my autonomy – I’ve a profound fear of being assimilated into or unduly influenced by *the other*.

§ **Saturday, July 12, 2003.** I’ve taken Dante’s Divine Comedy Inferno Test. It has banished me to the Sixth Level of Hell, the City of Dis. Here is how I’ve matched up against all the levels. I assume the score indicates my chances of residing at a particular level. Can you reside in more than one concurrently? As a fairly competitive person, especially where tests are concerned, I’m quite disappointed that I didn’t make it to level 9. What must one do to get there?

Table 3:

Level	Score
Purgatory (Repenting Believers)	Very Low
Level 1 - Limbo (Virtuous Non-Believers)	Very Low
Level 2 (Lustful)	Very High
Level 3 (Gluttonous)	Very High
Level 4 (Prodigal and Avaricious)	Extreme
Level 5 (Wrathful and Gloomy)	Very High
Level 6 - The City of Dis (Heretics)	Extreme
Level 7 (Violent)	Very High
Level 8- the Malebolge (Fraudulent, Malicious, Panderers)	Very High
Level 9 - Cocytus (Treacherous)	Extreme

specials, assuming that films from India would be second-rate, or too “foreign” for me to relate to. Boy was I wrong. These were some of the best films I’ve ever seen. Both were from the ‘50s, *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953) and *Pyaasa* (1957), and had much in common with the Italian neo-realism films from the same era, just absolute tear-jerkers, and so incredibly well done, beautifully done. I stand corrected. And now that the month is over I’m kicking myself for being so snobbish. What a jerk I am sometimes.

§ **Friday, June 26, 2003.** Another horrid night’s sleep, maybe six hours in total, fitfully twisting my damp sheet through the night while Mr. Darcy tried repeatedly to sleep beside me despite my gentle prods and pushes; he’s a furry hot water bottle and I can’t have him near when it’s this hot. Normally, I lollygag around the house in my nightgown for hours, drinking tea and flipping channels, but today I left for the office immediately upon rising, wanting to escape this intolerable furnace. It’s the first time I’ve longed to go to work.

At lunch, I ran into Hugh at Bay Bread. We were both buying pear and Roquefort sandwiches. “I’m so glad to have run into you. I was going to call you later to let you know that the new season of *League of Gentlemen* begins tonight at 7:20.” We were hugging and shrieking and giggling like schoolgirls. Julian will be *so happy* to hear *this* when he arrives home. I do hope it won’t be a disappointment as so much in life invariably is. Nevertheless, we’ll open a bottle of wine, order something yummy for dinner, and have a well-deserved, romantic, and restful evening. I am so glad that Julian returns home today.

§ **Monday, June 30, 2003.** I began the day by checking my email. There was a new message from Jeffrey, addressed to Jamie (I’d been copied), asking if he’d like to stop by their new place at one o’clock for a “quick tour,” then head over to the Filmore Jazz festival. “And do you have Lucie’s number? I tried to call to ask her along, but her telephone has been disconnected.” I quickly logged off and dialed Jamie.

“Are you going?”

“I think we’re going out of town this weekend. Are *you* going?”

“We’re *not* going to the jazz festival, but I’d like to take a quick peek at her new place all the same.”

“That’s right Lucie. A *quick peek*.”

“Are you sure you’ll be going out of town this weekend?”

“Yes.”

Bloody hell. I called Jeffrey. The first thing out of his mouth was, “What’s your new phone number?” I was trapped. I couldn’t *not* give it to him.

“555-4003”

” 5-5-5, 4-0-0-3. Why did you change your phone number anyway?”

“Because we’re trying to avoid certain people, you know, shake them off?”

“Oh. Did you get my note?”

“Yes, we’ll come by for a visit, to see your place, but I don’t think we’ll go to the jazz festival...”

“*You don’t want to go to the jazz festival?*”

"I don't like crowds."

"It doesn't get *that* crowded. We don't have to stay all day or anything."

"Ummm, well, I don't think we'll go, but we'll come by for a visit, okay?"

"We'll see how you feel, see if you feel like going to the festival *then*."

Jeffrey will try to wheedle us into going to this damnation, this *festinal*. We'll stick to our convictions, and end up looking like unsociable assholes. Why can't our wishes be respected? Why can't we just *socialize*. Why must some people *always* be *doing something*? Are we the *only* people who don't like to mingle with hordes of strangers?

I hate festivals, and especially street festivals. Up and down each side of the street will be vendors selling overpriced beer and hotdogs (Wait, this is San Francisco – *microbrews* and *portobello sausages on french rolls*), tie-dyed t-shirts, knick-knacks, chair massages, mugs, you get the drill. Street festivals, in my opinion, are an opportunist's excuse to sell crappy stuff and stuff your face with crap. Sure, you can listen to some two-bit "jazz" band, and commune with all the other festival-goers while the sun turns your face a becoming shade of tomato, but why voluntarily subject one's self to interminable torture?

§ Tuesday, July 1, 2003. Stanley is really beginning to get on my nerves. Following any personal telephone call of mine he snarks, "I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but *blah, blah, blah*." Today he heard me discussing Jeffrey Cool with Julian. "So, you're going to socialize with this person and then write terrible things about her *in your journal*?" Egad! I showed Stanley my journal once, ages ago, and he dismissed it with, "It's too long. It's too complicated." I didn't get the feeling that he in fact actually read it, but *is he now?*

How I regret *ever* telling *anyone* with whom I've associated about my journal. Doing so has obviously limited what I can or can't say – A writer's worst nightmare. I *think* I can write about Stanley. I feel sure that he *does not* read this, but should if he is reading this, well, let's just say that my days at my part-time, extra little job will be over. Worse yet? If anyone from the office should find my little *oeuvre*. I can just see Mr. Parent calling me into his office along with Mrs. Human Resources, to discuss my lack of discretion and give me my walking papers. Calm yourself – I change the names, but I wonder what the other repercussions could be? I've cavalierly told myself that "art is more important than commerce," but would I still feel so splendid, so untainted, while standing in line at the unemployment office?

Having worked myself up into a blather, I've just quit the telephone with Jamie, having made him swear *to God* that he won't tell *anyone* about my website. "I told someone ... now who did I tell? Now who was it?" ... "Great balls of fire. If Jeffrey Cool finds out what I've written about her, about the office, I'm dead."

§ Wednesday, July 2, 2003. Carmella came over for lunch today. I made a weird, bastardized version of a recipe I saw Nigella Lawson once make, bits of roasted chicken, mixed with pasta, *crème fraîche*, *demi-glace*, sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, and basil. I put too much garlic in, so it was almost inedible. This sort of thing happens often with me, with my cooking – a perfectly good idea, a perfectly good recipe, albeit modified, which I ruin somehow.

The last time I ruined a meal, Jamie and Hugh had come for dinner. I made "medieval stew," one of my inspired recipes, the basis of which was *bœuf daube*. I call it "medieval stew" because I

6. A keen interest in art, music, and literature, and a respect for artists which transcends their popularity or marketability. In America, art is a commodity, and if one's art doesn't sell, one is not respected. Money is tantamount to talent. A poor, struggling writer will be looked upon with suspicion by his family and peers. "What is wrong with you? Your writing doesn't sell; it must be terrible. Why don't you give up this art stuff and get a *real* job?"

7. An interest in and a respect for cultures other than mine. And yet, I can be extremely xenophobic when it comes to my own environment.

8. A love of sophisticated language and witicisms. And an extreme disdain for decimated language, especially gross grammatical disasters.

9. An ability to see all sides of an issue, and an eagerness to facilitate discussion which fairly addresses each. To always give my honest opinion, but to choose my real battles carefully.

10. An ability to say "no," and to stand up for myself in *any* situation. I am my own feudal lord.

11. I am *myself* fully without guilt or apology. I stand out from the crowd not because I long for attention, but because I don't care that I'm a square peg. I embrace in myself what is unique and cultivate it. Damn the consequences.

12. A joy in acknowledging the profound differences between man and woman. An ability to understand men and to make them *feel* manly, which in turn makes me feel like a woman. I embrace my own feminine qualities, play them up, but in a modern, independent, natural way – I'm at completely at ease and thrilled by my gender. And while I am, technically, a "feminist," I am not one in an American sense (Steinem, Peglia), but rather in the French (de Beauvoir)

13. I do not let work swallow my life. While it is true that I have two jobs, I'm not a slave to either. Outside of work I don't mention it, nor do I think of it. I don't arrive at the office early and I don't stay late. I don't feel guilty about sneaking out early, nor about taking a long lunch. To me, it is a *job*, a *burden*, a paycheck. I am not a corporate robot nor a ladder climber. My self-worth is mutually exclusive from my "career." Unlike most Americans, I have no respect for people who work themselves to death, rather, I feel a mixture of pity and contempt.

14. An ability to take criticism or a joke. It does not effect my self-esteem. I view criticism as nothing more than a vocalized opinion, silently existent nonetheless, which I can deflect or null over as I choose. I, the feudal lord, the star of the show, am the final arbiter of what is reasonable criticism or not – anything uncomplatable is nothing but vacuous talk.

§ Friday, July 11, 2003. A list of my "Frenchy" attributes necessitates a list of my "un-Frenchy" attributes; consequently, those traits which I feel I should work on. And not because they are "un-Frenchy." Rather, I see this list as an inventory of my character flaws, and sign that I'm a work in progress. Only the self-examined life is worth living. Now, who said that?

Edit and refine.

1. Cultivate a keener appreciation for the incidental joys of life, the little day-to-day occurrences, rituals, and events which make life worth living. To discard my "blinders" approach, as in, "Damn this commuter train. When I am home, *then* I will be happy." So much of our lives are spent commuting, standing in line, stuck in traffic, waiting for the doctor – all of it should be *experienced*, or it is wasted.

play with the other children. Indeed, when I did, I was oft times chased away, run off by our neighborhood bully, the *butch* Jane DeVries. I've never been good at physical activity, at sport, so I wasn't able to take part in the other children's games – I was just *really bad* at it, always picked last, heckled, teased. I was a fifth wheel and a drag, too sentimental, too dreamy, in retrospect too intelligent and creative. I should have liked to play “French Revolution,” “Addams Family,” or “Oliver Twist.” Is it any wonder that as an adult I've the same *problem*? I *still* hide in my room. I *still* want to pretend and to play at being something, or somewhere that I'm not.

I wonder if my 'teens and early twenties weren't an aberration? There *was* a novelty in being part of a *group*, a popular, incredibly hip group at that. When one has grown, when one has finally matured, when the thrill of exploration and experience is over, perhaps one's true nature resurfaces. All those anti-social attributes once seen as aberrations of childhood resurface from the tumultuous seas of youth, and stay put. It is no longer important to me to be a part of a group, to fit in, to be hip, to be trendy, to have social activity lined up from here 'til Christmas. And yet, I can't help but think that I'd be healthier, mentally that is, if I could find some sort of balance between these two extremes.

§ **Thursday, July 10, 2003.** An internet friend of mine, a fellow francophile, asked, “What is the *Frenchest* thing about you?” What a breathtakingly obvious question to ask, especially to me, and yet, no one has asked. I soundly congratulated her, and wished I'd thought of it myself. After mulling it over, I've compiled a fair list of my French traits, although I sometimes wonder if they aren't more “french” than French.

My life is a film, and I am the star.

1. My attention to detail, my refusal to settle for mediocrity. How so? This morning I made tea, Mariage Frères' *Eros*, in my exquisite, silver edged, white porcelain Mariage Frères tea pot, and drank it from a Bernadaud *Café Paris* teacup.

2. The devotion and attention that I get from *mon cher* Julian. You might say that he is wrapped around my little finger. I am sure that this turn of speech has some negative connotations for some, so let me make it clear that I am as wrapped around his, as he is mine.

3. The exquisite nest I've created for ourselves, our home. It is our very, very private space which reflects my personality especially; dreamy, inspirational, sexy, voluptuous, exotic, langorous – a haven from the outside world. It is, by normal American standards, a small apartment – tiny kitchen and bathroom, a sleeping alcove rather than a bedroom, but it does have a large *salon*. Very Parisian in size and in style, I'm extremely pleased by it, and when here, I feel *très Parisienne*.

4. Satisfying meals, and the incorporation of treats into my day – French wine, cheeses, and bread, fresh produce bought daily from the local farmer's or organic market. Home cooked, simple, fresh cuisine, using what's on hand to build an innovative and nutritious meal. Food is a significant part of our lives and I demand the best from this simple pleasure.

5. A devotion to elevating the simple, the essentials in life, to an art, while shunning the inessential and that which would complicate, diffuse, or weaken my personal vision, whether an activity, a person, or a possession. It is remarkable to me, that essential products and services become worse in quality, or extinct (cobblers, masons, laundrers, bakers, tailors), while inessential services and products increase exponentially (PDAs, video games, the Segway, kitchen gadgets, “Travel Care Alerts”).

use “medieval” spice, what I *think* of as “medieval” spice. It's a brilliant recipe, when it turns out, but this particular time I overestimated the clove – fatal. And the peas were a bit crunchy. Jamie and Hugh were ever so polite, but the last time I invited them over for dinner, they suggested we go for a drive instead.

Well, we diligently plodded through our pasta while I kept insisting how good garlic is for one's health. Does it offset the effects of *crème fraîche*? I don't know, but for dessert, I'd bought a melon to which we were eagerly looking forward to, the pasta being practically inedible and all. But the melon was rotten, so I served us each a tiny chocolate square upon a pretty dessert plate.

I wonder sometimes why I bother to cook, but we had a jolly good time despite my culinary contretemps. Carmella told us all about her writing group, bringing us samples of everyone's writing – I feel sure that were I in her writing group I'd be soundly criticized. There is a modern style you see, and I am not “hip.” No I am not. All the same I am very curious. It *would* be interesting to be a part of a group, to analyze another's writing; more importantly, to hear what others have to say about one's own scribbling. I wonder though, would it cause me undue self-consciousness? Would my writing become stilted? Affected? Or would it merely become more modern, an effect I should not like at all, at least, I don't think I would?

§ **Thursday, July 3, 2003.** I simply *could not, would not*, face the office today. Julian is on holiday both today and tomorrow, Independence Day. I should like nothing better than to stay put in my negligée all day, watching the films which have piled up round our house, unwatched and forlorn. I've been waiting for an opportunity such as this.

The day started uneventfully. We watched Chineses' loaned copy of *A Beautiful Mind*, and *Catch Me If You Can*, sent by Julian's dear Mother for his birthday. I must say, while I had shunned both as Hollywood flotsam, I was rather enchanted, especially with “Catch Me If You Can” which I found delightful.

Toward evening, the bombs began. I kept hoping that the bloody fool exploding them would blow his arm off, but I never heard screams nor sirens. The police are no help. To use a tired cliché, we live in an urban jungle, the unpatrolled Congo of San Francisco. Oh dear reader. It went on and on and on. At dark, the bombs were serenaded with whistling, exploding rockets. What will July 4th bring? I'm going to open a bottle of Pinot Noir *now* to try and comfort myself as best I can. Julian's just left for Indian take-out.

§ **Friday, July 4, 2003.** Ah. Independence Day. How I love Independence Day, or rather, the *idea* of Independence Day. I've a Rockwellian, Inge-ian fantasy in mind, involving a shady park by a lake, an old-fashioned bandstand replete with a gold-braided, uniformed band playing Souza, three-legged races, watermelon eating contests, hot dogs with relish, fried chicken, picnic benches, no ants or bees, a sunny day with no heat, and a polite crowd wearing '50s-era sundresses and summer suits. How's that?

The reality as we know has at the very least disheveled, pot-bellied people in shorts and thongs (I mean of course, *flip-flops*, which us old folks still refer to as *thongs*), and more commonly, ants, bees, and heat. So, it's no wonder that Julian and I hole up in what Carmella jokingly refers to as our “love box,” with our picnic food, and our sodden fantasies of holiday cheer. But don't be mistaken. Oh no. We have a marvelous time. I fear that I've painted a picture of two pathetic

people, old before their time, drapes drawn, hot dog in one hand, the remote control in the other, cursing all the young whippersnappers out having a good time (e.g. blowing up bombs), while we plot our revenge (which never happens.) Well, sure, yes, this is all true, but we do have a good time doing it. If we had a yard, we'd be in *it* of course, barbecuing our hot dogs like the rest of America, wearing our fashionable patio party gear, our party progressing nicely without the party-goers, cursing the neighbor's kids' poolside shrieking to our left, the barking dogs at our right.

§ Saturday, July 5, 2003. The rockets' red glare kept us up half the night. We spent the day watching film on Sundance and IFC, punctuated by elegant snacks and naps. Julian spent a fair amount of time writing. I've not had the energy, the enthusiasm, nor the inspiration one needs to write, my only work being these hastily written notes. Feeling apathetic about our evening's scheduled entertainments (more Sundance and IFC), we ordered a pizza and gave in to beckoning sloth and gluttony.

§ Sunday, July 6, 2003. I awoke at five this morning with a sudden jolt. I'd completely forgotten our date with Jeffrey yesterday. I couldn't believe it. I really couldn't believe that I'd forgotten him. I've never, ever done *this* before. What would I tell him? I couldn't just say that we *forgot* him, could I? I tried to think how I would feel if I should hear, "Oh, sorry to have stood you up dearie, but I *forgot* you entirely." Uh, no, that wouldn't do. I woke Julian in a panic. "We can't do anything about it now, so go back to sleep and we'll figure something out later." I went back to sleep, sort of, dreaming of Jeffrey, of pathetic mewling excuses, and his demands that we accompany Sharon and him to day two of the Fillmore Jazz Festival in order to make up for our *faux pas*.

I called Jeffrey at ten,

"I'm *so sorry*."

"What happened?"

"Well, we, um, decided to drive to Southern California to visit my Mother, and uh, ... our car broke down."

"Where?"

"Um, uh, ... in Burbank."

"We tried to call you, but your phone was busy." Damn! Damn! Julian had been on the computer all day, tying up the telephone line.

"Oh, well, you know, uh, sometimes when we leave, you know, uh, the cats get a little ramblunotions. They must have knocked the phone off the hook."

"Well, was it off the hook when you got home?"

"Yes, it was."

I wonder if he bought this horrible leaden lie? I should have just told him that we forgot. I'm such a pathetic idiot.

§ Tuesday, July 8, 2003. When I arrived at the office late this afternoon, everyone was gone. There was a sign on every door that said:

SIRSI TRAINING
ILC CLASSROOM
09:00 – 17:00

Why the 24-hour clock? Stanley's gone "military." After I'd gleefully thrown my feet onto the desk, I called Julian. No Answer. I tried Carmella. I was itching to tell her that Julian had run into Alain Sunday at the *boulangerie*, but she seemed unimpressed. She asked me if he had smelled, and I admitted that I'd not asked Julian if he had. We then spent the next thirty minutes complaining about Annie, this, from two ex-friends of hers who've repeatedly said they no longer wanted to discuss or think about her. I've invited her to go out Saturday night, but she's not sure if she can make it. She's instead asked us to come along with her to an art opening Friday in Oakland and a late supper at Bucci's.

§ Wednesday, July 9, 2003. Jeffrey seems to have bought my excuses. He's asked us to accompany them to a Django Reinhardt Festival, and oddly, I've accepted. I *do* love Django, but more importantly I feel like I'm becoming more reclusive, *too* reclusive. Why shouldn't I be able to go out into public and have a perfectly nice time? And this particular event should be more enjoyable than most; we'll bring a delicious picnic, umbrellas, and several of our cushier blankets. I'll wear a pretty hat and loads of sunscreen. I'll make an effort to be agreeable, ask Jeffrey and Sharon lots of questions about what they like to do, read, listen to, what their dreams for the future are. If the people around us are loathsome, I'll try to be impervious to their shortcomings.

I didn't use to be so sensitive. As a teenager I went to outdoor, all day concerts with my friends, surrounded by strangers, all of us bound together by our love of music. Later, I was an avid nightclub goer and scenester, jetting to Seattle, New York and Los Angeles, toting with bands, attending nefarious parties which in retrospect seem unworlily in their decadent grandeur. I rubbed shoulders and *more* with some Very Important People.

But it seems the older I become the more intolerant I am of the people around me, I've begun to notice behaviour which never registered before – everything, anything distracts me *now*. I'm not happy about this change, and I want to try to reverse, or at least arrest its progress. But can I? Or is this simply the normal progression of life? At this stage, I wish to be calm, to be serene, to be able to insulate myself from the outside world, but can't I do it without resorting to outright hibernation? I don't want to live a high-profile life anymore, and I certainly don't – I sometimes wonder if my behaviour is reactionary, that I've gone from one extreme to the other. Regardless, I can't deny my true nature. I can't just change into someone completely different, however much I think that I'd be happier. All the same, I can't help but think that people who *enjoy* other people are more content, are more well adjusted. What *is* their secret? Has my penchant for dimly lit, damask curtained, private salons, and my rejection of lively congenial crowds perhaps fed my neurosis?

As a child, I spent Saturdays and Sundays in my room, door closed, concealing elaborate dream worlds with my building blocks and tiny plastic animals, all the while listening to records on my phonograph – aescop and Hans Christian Anderson were my favorites. I didn't like to

at these *things* and these *people* the next time I'm in Paris. I must do some research to see where they go, so that I may studiously avoid them.

On going to the Segway Tours of Paris website, I find it just gets better and better, pictures of happy Segway riders dressed like children in cargo shorts, marshmallow sneakers, and oversized t-shirts, an itinerary which includes a stop to get ice-cream cones at Berthillon on the île-St-Louis. It's all so cheerfully *American*, in the most nauseating and obnoxious way. Here are some of the other highlights they offer to you, the "Paris for Dummies" tourist, at their office:

Starbucks coffee and other refreshments and snacks
Our t-shirts
Friendly and fun atmosphere
Free and clean bathrooms
Great music
Our owner's dog - "Bailey"

"Friendly and fun atmosphere"? I can just imagine the saccharine comments and feedback they must get—"It's like I'd never left Des Moines!", "Everyone was *so* friendly!", "There was a *real* bathroom! And it was *clean*!", "Finally! A decent cup of coffee to go!", "It was Paris, but without the French part!", "It was *so* fun!" *Gee-sus!*

Success! Madeleine *loved* our article. We're to sign the release forms today, and be paid. I can't believe I'm finally to be a "published writer". I've started our next installment, but wonder if it's a bit, well, platitudinous. Ever since Mother called my writing "endless strings of platitudes" I've been hypersensitive to my own writing, scanning endlessly for clichés and vapidty. In all honesty, it *is* platitudinous in contrast with her own writings, which I find to be excessively drab and impassive — she would have made an excellent technical or writer of primary school textbooks.

§ **Tuesday, September 16, 2003.** I'm torn whether I should admit to what I did today — this is my *personal* journal after all, and I should divulge that which happens to me *personally*, right? Yet I fear that talking about it will raise eyebrows, or worse yet, paint an odd picture of me. But most of all I'm afraid that I'll try to justify it, and this is what I want least to do, but I do, because there is this part of me that feels ever so guilty for spending a lot of money on clothes. As much as I enjoy *it*, shopping, and as much as I enjoy looking well, very well if you must know, it's difficult to reconcile my vanity with my personal politics. And then, I don't want to *bore* the pants off you with the talk of *things* and *stuff* [stuffed laughter], but I *am* human, and I *am* female — *very* female!

Oh the hell with it! Appearances be damned! I'll admit it! I'm so very, *very* excited! I've bought a new coat, the first *new* coat I've *ever* bought for myself! Really! I've always searched thrift stores and vintage boutiques for coats, sometimes successfully, but more and more not so successfully at all — as time goes by, vintage stock depletes for the eras I enjoy; all the good stuff is gone. My latest thrift store find was a plain, mildly tailored black cashmere, nothing fancy, and a little too 1950ish for my taste though it did have full length sleeves, and it was not an A-line. I had it restyled last year — new collar and cuffs in a tapestry fabric. But the coat *is* old; there are some worn spots, a few tiny moth holes if you scrutinize it closely, the "seat" is probably a little shinier than one would like — let's face it, the coat has been better days. And while I could

I've found that there is a French documentary on Léaud, made in 2001, *Léaud l'unique* [English title: *Léaud, the One and Only*]. I'd give my right eye to see it. It's out there, oh yes, it has played at several film festivals this year. I keep my fingers crossed that it will be out on DVD, someday...

§ **Thursday, July 24, 2003.** We've made plans for Friday night to go to Asia SF with Chines, Schippers, and Bill. I'm looking forward to it, as we've been instructed to dress *casually formal* for the occasion. I'll have such fun playing with the idea of "casually formal." The traditional dress categories are sadly no more, but I am encouraged that this night spot has mentioned dress; and that they've used the label "formal". I shall bring my new Badgley Mischka evening bag, and wear my 1917 gown trimmed with Japanese fabric. Julian will wear his linen suit.

It's so rare that we go to a supper club, and with such delightful company. Only the presence of Nick and Nora Charles could make it more glamorous — a swank San Francisco supper club, Oriental cross-dressing waiters and entertainers, a shady South of Market location, the *mâtée d'* who resembles Robert Benchley, it's so Thin Man-esque. We must drink martinis.

Carmella has asked us this morning to take the "enneagram test". I've no idea what all this means, but according to Carmella, we've both scored well, and I must admit, this does sound like me, warts and all. Are you beginning to understand your hostess?

§ **Monday, July 28, 2003.** Eleanor came by my office today, *beaming*. I've not really talked to Eleanor, for months. We socialized with her and her husband several times last year — we visited her house, she visited ours, but the only think we've in common with Eleanor and Nero, is our common interest in France. Technically, we're all Francophiles, but only in name, for Eleanor and Nero have a Hallmark card with soft focus edges idea of France, whereas ours is solidly based in reality, at least, I try as hard as I can to keep it that way.

If there were a French version of Thomas Kinleade, Eleanor would collect his paintings. As it is, she's proud of her framed Monet prints of the garden at Giverny. Eleanor loves the Impressionists, Debussy, Rodin, the aforementioned Monet. A lively interest in Camille Claudel, and traveling with Rick Steves' *Paris Through the Back Door* assures him she's "edgy".

Still, I enjoy Eleanor and her husband despite their naïveté. Playing the maven, I've loaned them books, recommended films; I've tried my best to "roughen" them up a bit, initiate them to *la vraie* France, steer them away from touristic France.

Eleanor's terribly eager, too eager. She practices her French on everyone at the office. I think she's blind to the fact that not everyone cares about, nor understands French. Even I, enthusiastic as I am, can hardly listen to his horribly mangled, "Bon-jur. Saw-vaa?" but she's so *ardent*, so cheerful, and so oblivious, that I can't but humor her through gritted teeth. Poor Eleanor, the naïf. But why do I call her poor? Good God. Eleanor, the schmuck-ess, owns a two million dollar house — paid for — and has a high paying job at the office. She is definitely *not* poor like yours truly.

So, as I was saying, Eleanor waltzed into my office this afternoon, high as a kite, *radiant*, to tell me that she and her husband are going to look at property in France, and " ... we thought that maybe you were too." Well, no. We're not. We're poor, unlike you. We've five beastly jobs between the two of us, we live in a studio in the Tenderloin, and we drive an old beat-up Nissan —

the “social liability”, as we clearly refer to it. Now, what gave you the idea that we can afford to buy property in France? Hummm?

She went on and on and on: about how “Life is great.”, how “It couldn’t be better.”, how “Everything is falling into place.”, how they are going to “Live out our dreams.”, &c, &c. I just sat there, slack jawed, numb, staring at her big, happy plank-teeth. So finally, I said, “How are you going to pay for this?” Eleanor got a little serious; I’d taken the wind out of her sails. She may have realized that she was rapturously blathering to someone a little further down in the food chain. “Well, Nero’s parents are going to help. What about you? You could do this too, couldn’t you? Why don’t you?” “Well Eleanor,” I said, “not everyone has rich and generous parents. Some people have poor, miserly parents. And some people can’t afford to pay two mortgages.”

After she left I stewed a bit. As nasty and dog-in-the-manger-ish as it may sound, it feels rotten to have good fortune rubbed in one’s face, especially when *it’s what one wants most and can’t have*. But I felt like a jerk; I’d taken all the fun out of her revelation. She thought I’d be congratulatory, knowing that more than anything else in the world, I’d love to live in France, and I do congratulate her, grudgingly. But the truth is, I’m envious as hell, and bitter, and resentful, because I can’t afford to do what she’s doing and, save a winning lottery ticket, it doesn’t seem that I ever will. It’s terribly unfair that I’m unable to live in Paris, in France, in a place where I honestly feel at home, comfortable. I’m not just some misty-eyed France lover, I’m an artist. I belong on the Left Bank damn it. Amalgamating with the quasi-literati, communing with the spirits of Colette, Anais Nin, and Jean Rhys, writing my dreadful prose, a glass of Pinot Noir and a Gantloise near to hand.

In reality? While I work ‘til I die, as *I’m* tottering back to my wretched studio through our drug infested neighborhood at age 80, Eleanor and Nero will be living out a Mayleesian fantasy: cheerful innocuous yokels coming by for wine and cheese, waving from their bicycles, jollification all ‘round. They’ll be fat and happy, serene with their Monet prints, and Rick Steves guidebooks, their reproduction Camille Claudel in the herb garden near the pool.

§ Tuesday, July 29, 2003. It’s terribly cold outside. I can tell from where I sit, from my dreary desk in the University basement that there is a howling cold freezing fog blowing. Somehow, this view through the dungeon door and out the next room’s window comforts me, makes me feel a little cozier, much as Bob Cratchett must have felt when he threw another lump of coal on his meagre fire. Yes, the Victorian symbolism works – I’ve my hat from Laics with the handmade flowers, my favorite sweater that’s seen better days; I refuse to part with it until I can find another I love as much. Stanley and Chastity have finally gone and I’m waiting for Julian – he always accompanies me home through the slums, protection from Jack the Ripper. We’ll take a sleepy N to Powell Street, then traverse a nearly deserted Union Square. It’s late, and when we finally arrive home there will be barley soup and ham sandwiches lit by the flicker of a black and white film.

I long for winter, for the luxury of my heavy cashmere coat, my hat shielding me from the cold. It’s then that I feel myself a fortress, bundled against the elements, hidden in rich folds of fabric, an enigmatic Gorey heroine with racoon eyes. But first comes Autumn, my most beloved season with its soft light and amber colours, its promise of new beginnings, long evenings set in front of a fire, book in hand; dreary, languorous, starchy-sliced Fall.

How beastly the summer, the sun, the heat; its savage rituals of sun bathing, its vulgar

this particular teapot. I’ll have to use an old milk bottle until I can find a suitable replacement.

§ Saturday, September 13, 2003. Another unseasonably hot day in San Francisco – 95 F, which means it was, at the very least, 100 F in our apartment. We spent the day splayed about the furniture, drinking iced tea (the old milk bottle is working rather well, I must say), too hot to read, too hot to walk to the pool, too hot to watch T.V. even. I’m out of sugar-free popsicles.

Madeleine e-mailed, finally, to say that the article Julian and I wrote for her publication isn’t exactly what she had in mind. I had quite given up on hearing from her, ever, assuming that her silence was polite dismissal. After several e-mails back and forth it was determined that our article could be “salvaged” (though she admitted that she hated to use that word) with a little editorial work on my part. I have revisiting anything that I write. It’s like reliving boot camp. But I’ll do it, *gladly*. I can’t believe I’ve committed to yet another “project”, but I am excited over the prospect of being “published” in a legitimate online journal. Let’s hope I can come up with the goods, regularly.

§ Sunday, September 14, 2003. I spent the night trying to sleep, hopped up on iced tea. Like Balzac, who consumed massive amounts of coffee for artistic inspiration and energy, my mind was a blur of ideas for articles, stories, journal entries. Then this morning, nothing.

Carmella and I have made plans to meet at Café Claude Friday night after work. She’ll be bringing Guy, who I can’t wait to meet, again. I’d met him some years ago; he remembers me well(?), though I remember him little I’m ashamed to say. Kenneth is having a party this same evening to which we may or may not go. As much as I’d like to attend (Kenneth’s parties are always *sumptuous*, and I’ve not seen him in ages), I find some of his friends to be frankly tiresome. I expect I’ll be cornered by one of his coworkers whose *mison d’être* is networking and business connections, bombarded with questions intended to size me up, “What do you do?”, “Where do you live?”. I frankly don’t know how Kenneth puts up with this sort, but he unfortunately must to some degree as he scrambles to make a living. And while we seem to amuse him and Philippe well enough, Julian and I have nothing to offer the others but ourselves and our meager interests which must seem trifling, no flashy car, no powerful connections, no possibilities. We’re hopelessly small-time with our pint-sized bank accounts, and drab livelihoods as librarians. Though I’m able to successfully reassure myself that I’m perfectly interesting and worthy, it’s nonetheless difficult for me to face a room full of strangers under any circumstances. Still, one must socialize, mustn’t one?

§ Monday, September 15, 2003. OH. MY. GOD. I’ve seen the final death throes of our national dignity – Americans on Segways in Paris. Just when you thought that things couldn’t possibly get any worse, just when you were convinced that we’ve reached the nadir of American civilization, you’re face to face with “American owned and operated” Segway Tours of Paris. GOOD GOD! Could the unerring image of fat, lazy, rude, inhuman American slobs pushing and shoving their way through the world become any more undeniable? I am *horrified* beyond belief. What’s next? Segway Tours of Paris with subwoofers blasting the latest MTV horror? Segway Tours of Paris with cupholders and food trays? *Extreme* Segway Tours of Paris through the Bois de Boulogne? Segway Tours of French châteaux? I can’t believe I’m going to have to *look*

I hope this is all conjecture, I hope this only the effect of grand acting – you see, you’ve effected me in your decrepitude as much as you have in your youth. Jean-Pierre, I hope you are happy. I hope you are well.

And so I’ve joined the gym. Jean-Pierre’s physical condition has given me a scare. I am not a smoker, nor do I drink to excess, but I don’t exercise as much as I should, and I *do* like to eat, to cook. I’ve joined the gym several times, and quit six months later. I don’t like to sweat. I hate jogging. I hate aerobics. I hate those funny little bicycles with the wiggly arms. But today I’ve entered the pool. The pool, where all is calm, and blue, and the hum of the filter soothes. I swam laps for an hour and a half. It was bliss. They had to kick me out. I once swam every day, years ago. I’d forgotten how good it is, how good I am at it. It is one of the only physical activities at which I excel. Outdoor pools had always put me off, but finally an indoor *piscine* with a view of the cypresses cutting through the fog. There is a public *piscine* at St-Germain. Perhaps I will swim there next time I’m in Paris.

§ **Monday, September 8, 2003.** I talked on the phone for an hour with Carmella this morning. She wrapped up the conversation by saying, “It would be terrible to die, but really, I think someone should just drop a bomb on the U.S. Everyone would be a lot better off. The world would be a lot better off.” I tend to agree with her.

Carmella is off to New York at the end of this month to stay with a college friend of hers who lives in a loft on 5th avenue. It sounds so glamorous. I wish I had fancy friends who lived on 5th avenue. It’s been years since I’ve been to New York; everyone I knew there has moved away. I miss the East Village Indian restaurants.

§ **Wednesday, September 10, 2003.** I read Andrew’s online journal today; a highly amusing read, and a unabashed look at American culture from someone who’s been living in France for the last year. Andrew’s journal was perfectly written, beautifully sparse, the words perfectly chosen, no *fat* as he would say. There’s nothing like reading really *good* writing to make one feel that his own is intolerably bad, and compared with Andrew, my writing sounds juvenile, stupid, pointless. I tell myself that this is what he has been trained to do, what he’s been doing his entire life, and it’s no good comparing oneself with another – why must Americans (myself included) always rank things? Why must everything be a contest? I won’t let it bother me, and I can always console myself by heading over to Live Journal and reading the diaries of preteen girls.

It all seems to utterly useless sometimes, this whole business of journal keeping. And my instinct it to make it richer in its documentation of minutiae which would make it even more purposeless, I think. Yet, I find that those journals I enjoy reading most are those which describe the more mundane aspects of life, rescheduling an appointment with the therapist, a hellish cross-town bus ride, an overheard conversation while waiting in line at the Piggy-Wiggly; somehow, when these things are written of, they take on epic proportions. What someone has eaten for breakfast becomes the stuff of melodrama, a necessary prop which otherwise would leave the larger story devoid of colour and dimension.

§ **Friday, September 12, 2003.** I carelessly broke the spout off my Mariage Frères teapot today. I’m inconsolable. Julian assures me that we’ll find me a new one, but I had so loved

displays of flesh, its propagation of sweat and other odiferous effusions . I long for late October, the most perfect time of year, when daylight saving time has ended, when the verdant things are turning in on themselves for quiet winter reflection. A time for comfort and ease, soft velvets, thick coverlets, uniber coloured stews with medieval spice, *Hachis Parmentier* and heavy red wine. I love the mysterious hysteria of Hallowe’en, the smells and sounds of Thanksgiving, and double-edged Christmas, which when tamed, when exorcized, can be glorious – a lonely cabin on the Northern coast, a wind-whipped sea, champagne and roast pork with nary a cutout Santa or illuminated snowman in sight.

I waken from my reverie; the University will have closed up shop in twenty minutes. I must put my desk in order, rearrange my files, cover my Underwood. As I am the last to leave, I shut off the machines, put out the lights, lock the heavy doors. At the tram stop, it will be cold and windy. But at home, tonight, we’ll be cozy, in anticipation the sweet melancholy of the glittering, dolorous months ahead.

§ **Wednesday, July 30, 2003.** I grew up with conflicting instructions: “Don’t judge a book by its cover” paired with a critical eye towards the “face” one shows the world. I agree that there are many standards of beauty, many notions of what’s attractive. I know that one “shouldn’t judge” and that “it’s what’s on the inside that counts.”

However ... I think that people who go out into public looking like they’ve just rolled out of bed, who take no effort with their appearance are lazy – they’ve no respect for themselves or those around them. While I would never insult these people to their faces, I can never support, nor even ignore, these people’s actions. To me, it’s a matter of personal pride, an acknowledgment of one’s place and his contribution to a society. Of course, when the majority of society no longer cares how they appear nor how they act, when they no longer care how they affect their fellow man, it’s a larger problem than just an isolated slob here and there; it’s a sickness – a demise of manners, style, and courtesy.

I was raised to appear “presentable” when in public. Presentable, respectable, decent, well groomed, call it what you will, but it consists of several basic elements: Hair brushed and styled, lipstick on, clothes clean, pressed, and neat, *shoes* shined (and I emphasize shoes because trainers are not acceptable public footwear unless one is on his way to or from the gymnasium.) For good measure, let us also add: no eating or smoking in inappropriate places, i.e. on public transport or in the street, no gum chewing, voice tempered please, body parts in check.

When in public, we no longer care about the well-being of others. The cult of “the individual” is king. An opened door, an “excuse me” when in someone’s way, moving aside to let another pass, these are *aberrations* in behaviour and no longer the norm. The individual’s comfort and personal freedom are preeminent to “the other”, and it follows, to the happiness and health of society.

Gather ‘round children, and I will tell you a fable. Once upon a time, Americans cared to look nice; they were presentable and well mannered. People dressed to go out. There were clothes for dining, for town, for luncheon, for evening. Men wore suits, ties, and hats. Ladies didn’t go out without their gloves, a wrap, their heads covered. People looked *romantic, fascinating*. There was nary a Gap T nor a cargo pant in sight. Then came the *Cultural Revolution*. Men grew their hair, women burned their bras. Civilized man tried his best to combat this plague with grass-roots activism, “No shirt, no shoes, no service”, but it was all for naught. And today, instead of emulating urbane icons like Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, the Marchesa Casati, Robert de

Montesquieu-Ferzense, or Charles Baudelaire, children idolize trumpy rap stars and vainglorious two-bit Hollywood actors. The end.

Every year, when returning home from France, I never cease to be shocked: it is absolutely appalling how “ugly” everyone (and everything) has become. Let’s face it – Americans have not only quit caring for their own appearance, but for their compatriots’ appearances as well. The critical stance, the finicky temperament has atrophied: it’s “not nice” to be censorious. And by the way, isn’t it funny how Americans just want to be “nice”, just wish to be “liked”? It’s taboo to find fault or disapprove of another’s appearance or behaviour – it’s simply not “politically correct”.

Alas, popularity is preferable to polish. And then, we’re apathetic too. We’ve lost what style we possessed, become progressively more banal, increasingly boorish. We complain that we’ve no time to take with our appearance; we’ve not the money to look good. Hogwash. Stuff & Nonsense. Isn’t it only a matter of priority? Looking presentable, facing a hostile world with charm and politeness, has nothing to do with expense and everything to do with bravery and courage. To look good, to behave impeccably, effort *is* involved, one must have some backbone; it is no accident. One should not effect a *laissez-faire* approach towards his person, rather, he should care what others think – and I mean this in the most superficial way, for when it comes to his opinions or private life, he should give not a fig for what others think.

We’re reaping our rewards, though they are not *mine*; I suffer amidst the insufferable denizens of this quagmire: we’re the fattest people in the world, the most anti-intellectual. While we can find neither the money nor the interest in support of the arts, we’re the leaders, the trailblazers when it comes to casual comfort. We’ve colonized the world with our country’s leading cultural achievements – Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Nike. We’re the inventors of words like “self-esteem” and “self-help”; we’re the godhead of the cult of the individual. No, I am not content in this society. I don’t relate to this culture. I vehemently long for style and elegance, refinement in manner, for a world where to be civilized, to be educated, to be original, are the highest of aims. We’re in desperate need of a “twisted revolution”, a “cult of count!”

At the supper club last Friday night, at Chinese birthday celebration, we were *not* overdressed. As I said I would, I wore a vintage tea-gown with Japanese accents, while Julian wore his linen suit. Our little party was stylish and elegant, befitting for a Friday evening’s entertainment out. But compared to the other diners, we stood out. And what were other diners wearing? Jeans, sweatshirts, ill-fitting rayon “office clothes”, street clothes of the most standard variety. No glamour, no sophistication, and while the entertainers wore fabulous costumes, and while the food was gracefully presented, it was lathsome even so. How much more fun it would have been, had everyone taken their role in the evening as seriously. We are *all* on display for one another when in public; these slatterns and slouches were a blight on an otherwise delightful excursion.

Slovenly dress and behaviour is like cancer. There are many who would join in with equally inappropriate conduct. Like sheep, they see another’s misguided display as *permission*. “Hey look at that guy. Why did I bother getting all dressed up for? Next time, I’ll wear something *comfortable*.” “Hey, that guy’s eating pizza on the commuter train. Why shouldn’t I do it too?” And you know, people once knew how to behave, they didn’t need to be instructed – on invitations (black-tie), with signage, “no eating, drinking, or smoking” – people just *knew* how to treat one another, how to act in public. Now, even instructions won’t work; feeling entitled, self-important, omnipotent, people do what they damn well please, defying anyone to tell them otherwise.

How much more civilized the daily grind would be, if people cared about appearances and

a maze. We sat upon our leather couch, planning our divorce. The doorbell rang. Now who could that be? Were we expecting company? Have I forgotten something? A mass of suburbanites, Stepford husbands and wives marched in, eyes glowing, fangs gleaming, lips moist, menacing, robotic.

“Did you forget about your *party*? It’s your *anniversary*. We’re your *friends*. We’re here to *celebrate*”, they all drowned in unison. “I’ll just run to the Gas n’ Go for wine and nuts,” I heard myself say. “You do that,” said the leader, a dark haired, middle-aged woman, a kind of zombie-esque Jackie O. with goat eyes. Panicking, fearful, wondering how I’d forgotten this “event”, I searched the house for my car keys, my coat, lost in a maze of generic linen closets and featureless hallways.

Eleanor from work appeared, beaming, preternaturally cheerful. For once, her plank-teeth was welcome, a familiar, friendly sight in this white-washed mausoleum of moaning automations. “I’ll drive you to the store!” Like an amnesiac who slowly regains his consciousness, I dimly realized that Eleanor’s husband Néro was my “boyfriend”. It was he for whom I was leaving H.J. Eleanor ushered me through the milling mob of pill-box hats, polo shirts, and twin-sets to my SUV outside. Eleanor took the wheel, but as she’d never driven an SUV, she plunged us over a cliff as we backed out of the driveway. We rolled over and over, everything was spinning; it was like one of those crazy Dalí-esque dream sequences where everyone was screaming, and a spiral was spiraling. I awoke – relieved, amused, pleased.

§ **Saturday, September 6, 2003.** “I can barely conceive of a type of beauty in which there is no Melancholy?” – Charles Baudelaire

§ **Sunday, September 7, 2003.** I’ve joined the gym, again, with best intentions. I simply *must* “shape up”, lose weight, improve my appearance. I should like to be a knock out, to wear my new French suits this fall. It’s all about clothes, though thoughts of my health wait about in the misty back streets of my mind.

I wonder if it all has to do with a film we saw this week, *Le Pornographe*. Jean-Pierre Léaud, at 56, played the lead. Oh, how he’s aged, and he’s not aged well – I was shocked. Here is what a life of smoking, drinking, and no exercise will do to one. Paunchy, his face sagging and wrinkled, he looked much like an old Indian chief, his un-kempt hair in his eyes, his mouth turned down into a permanent scowl.

And yet, if this is all it had been, his physical demise, I wouldn’t have been so affected, I think. But it was the loss of his spirit; the light has been put out. He seems squashed, pitiful, defeated. And, perhaps, this was only a reflection of his character. If so, he played it better than I’ve ever seen him play anything else – he was the *picture* of a broken man.

And then, there was his gasping, his horrible gasping breaths which he took after speaking each of his lines. I wonder, does he have emphysema? Oh, my poor, poor Jean-Pierre. How I wish I could breath some life into you. Your demise is heart-wrenching. You no longer leap over window sills and run everywhere. Your theatrical use of cigarettes, and devil-may-care drinking seem misguided to me now. You’ve lost your trim figure, your beautiful profile. Your “ti”, your flame seems to have died down to almost nothing. Has the beaten you down into a forlorn heap? Are you, like *le pornographe*, only a shadow of yourself?

a muffled, earnest discussion about some ancient document – to toss, or not to toss? If it were up to me, I'd shove it all into the shredder.

My fellow workers, in anticipation of the more informal environment are lingering more and more in the hallways outside one another's offices, making nuisances of themselves with their raucous conversations about vegan lunchmeat, a piano missing from the break room, an afternoon golf date. I want to scream at them all to use their offices while they're still able to use them, "... for God's sake!" We'll be in each other's hair soon enough, thank you very much.

§ **Thursday, September 4, 2003.** How lucky for me that I didn't attempt to read on my journey home from the office today; instead, I wrote. School has started; the train is packed with Stanford students pulling wheeled *suitcases*, gargantuan "backpacks", full of thick books, and motley groups of high school students brandishing hockey sticks and "boom boxes".

It seems as well that racing season has begun. Our train makes a stop at Bay Meadows, where throngs of elderly Chinese men get on; pushing, shoving, they look as though they spend every penny earned on doomed racing clits. Their clothes, their entire appearance are of men who've given up on life – the only thing that matters to them any longer is the anticipation of a win. I've always wondered about compulsive gamblers. It's impossible for me to understand it, yet I feel intense pity for these men and their families. The human condition – we all have our *drugs*, our *medication*. For me, writing is perhaps a compulsion, a medication of sorts.

Why do I write? I don't know exactly, but I can tell you that the most rewarding, the most therapeutic writing I do is that which I know will never have an audience, that which will never be read. Writing with a reader in mind is to write with boundaries, with restrictions, though perhaps unspoken and unconscious, it is a hindrance to my creativity and turns it into a chore. So much of what I've written in the past, which I planned and gave great thought to, which I visualized as "speaking" to a particular audience, I now find to be utterly contemptible in its tone (cheery, non-threatening, school-marmish, editorial). I wish neither to censor my thoughts nor to offend, yet I fear with one comes the other; I cannot please everyone, I can only please myself.

But why, you may well wonder, why do you "publish" your writings for all the world to see? Isn't it really *true* that in fact, you *do* write for others? While I know that people read what I write, and while it does please me that they read it (I would be lying if I denied this), the anonymity of it, the vast possibilities of an audience of millions, or audience of none, make the whole endeavour so abstract a notion as to render it inert as far as affecting my "voice" – I speak to everyone, I speak to no one. There is no "audience" as such. I am not affected by self-consciousness, though there are some topics which I should never, ever mention.

I wish there were more pure poetry in my language, more metaphor, more mystery. It's easy for me to talk about my feelings, but I fear it's a bit trite, a bit journalistic, rather like a Victorian lady's account of her "life-changing" trip to Florence. I should like to be an Anais Nin, but fear that I come across as a Miss Wickam, or worse, a Mrs. Teasdale.

§ **Friday, September 5, 2003.** I was married to H.J. Heddler from the film *Quartet* – red-faced, smug, horrid Germanic mustache. We lived in a sprawling, suburban McMansion, vaulted ceilings, white walls, modern, if tasteful furnishings. The kind of place in which you could find yourself lost at a dinner party, searching for the bathroom; the doors and walls looked identical,

treated one another with consideration. I purposefully mind my manners, and I try to dress well, but I fear I'm an army of one. With Julian, that makes two. Still, there is dim hope. Very dim. There are a few who wish to turn the back tide of barbarianism.

I point you to *The Chap Magazine* and *Bloody Beautiful*, small press publications from opposite ends of the Earth, by like-minded men of style, wit, and flavour, who endeavor to imbue life with a little elegance and élan. Could proper manners, flair and finesse act as cancer killers? If enough of us see fit to act, then perhaps yes.

§ **Thursday, July 31, 2003.** Stanley is a menace. I've emailed Mr. Phelps to ask if I can move to the other side of the room and away from Stanley. I must get away from him – he's dangerous.

I arrived at the University today in a cheerful mood – for once. I chatted with Herbert for a while and when Stanley came in I was friendly. I'd been giving him the cold shoulder lately, and I wish I'd not let down my guard.

"Would you go along with a 'fragrance-free' policy in this department?"

"Am I bothering someone with my perfume? Did anyone say anything?"

"No one said anything. A couple of us came up with the idea."

"Why would you just *come up with* a 'fragrance-free' policy if no one's complained?"

"We just think it would be a good idea."

Well, *I know* this is all about me. I am the only one in this department who wears perfume – I'm sure of it. Chastity certainly does not, and I can't imagine that Cubeta does. Everyone else is male, and therefore "fragrance-free". What is this world coming to when one can't even wear perfume to disguise the stench of modern America? Sheesh.

Later, Stanley admitted to me that several people *had* complained. After giving him the third degree, he told me who (Herbert and Cubeta); when I asked him exactly what was said he claimed he couldn't remember. How grave is this? Should I take this seriously? And why has he made it *his* business anyway? He's a gossip and a troublemaker. A little old woman. All he needs is a babushka and a cornucop pipe. I must move to the other side of the room, out of ear, and nose shot of Stanley. I must keep a low profile; this is only a job, after all.

§ **Tuesday, August 12, 2003.** I've been accused of being bigoted. Why? Because I want to live during a time when there was segregation and racism – the past. This person confuses my love of all things old with a love of hateful ways. How wrong they are.

When I say that I feel an affinity for the past, and a great sense of loss for the "old ways" and "old customs", I'm bemoaning the disappearance of what was positive, what was good – life at a slower pace, attention to detail, *quality* in service and products, a job done with pride, elegance and charm. Much of this loss has do with the "machine age", modernity, "progress", the belief which surfaced after WWII that a scientific rather than a humanistic approach was preferable.

We bulldozed charming old buildings and replaced them with the air-conditioned nightmares of the '60s, frozen and prepackaged foods were deemed superior to fresh. Pesticides, hormones, and corporate farming took over. Many mom and pop businesses were decimated by chain franchises,

Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Rite-Aid, Ralph's, ad nauseum. Small towns were bypassed by the interstate freeways. Life changed dramatically, and in my opinion, for the worse.

And this is why France, French life, is such a powerful symbol, such a powerful draw to me, because France, unlike the United States, has acknowledged the value of "the human" element of life on a "human scale". In France, there are still craftsmen, small business still survives. Fast food franchises don't flourish there because the French want to take time with their meals, and more importantly to eat well; they will not accept genetically supplied foods nor hormone lained meats.

France resonates with me because it still values what we've discarded so long ago – we've sold our soul for world leadership; we produce more food than any country in the world, but we're fatter than any in the world. Hollywood leads the world in cinematic output, but 99

In the latest issue of National Geographic, there was an article about the Marais section of Paris. I found it to be so very inspiring (it made me cry in fact), not because I'm a huge fan of the Marais, but because of the people, the Parisians, those Marais dwellers who were profiled. The strange and romantic woman with the barrel organ with her *trés Français* approach to life, her philosophical comments. The guy who "lives" in the 19th century, writing poetry in the tea room at Mariage Frères, restoring antique fabrics for his living. Let's face it, these people, they just couldn't exist here. Our society does not produce these types who have such a wondrous devotion to a life lived beautifully, who are devoted to their work, doing it because they've a passion for it and not because they can make a pile of money.

I will acknowledge that there *are* some people States-side who live in garrets, restoring paintings, scratching out poetry, mending antique lace dresses, but in fact, most of these people are young. The old folks chuckle and say to themselves, "They'll learn, these young, passionate, artistic kids. They'll settle down, join the Young Republicans and go to law school. They'll get a real career after they've sickened of living on crusts of bread, oranges, and cheese, after *la vie de bohème* has worn thin." But in France, no. These are respectable métiers, these are a life's work. There still exist apprentices who learn crafts, trades. There is still a devotion to the arts – all art. This isn't just a colourful aberration in the Marais; it exists throughout France, and in fact, all of Europe.

Of course there are French stockbrokers, French doctors, French lawyers, there are French who are out to make a whole bunch o' money. There is, no doubt, the equivalent of the Young Republicans in France. And I will readily admit that it's more difficult in many ways to get along in France than it is here – there are more unemployed, there is more competition, family connexions and background are more important – it's not all piano shops on the left bank, artisans in ateliers.

Unlike us, France has been able to keep what is good about French culture. They have preserved their cultural past, their cultural history, both monumental and traditional. I long for these things, and I find them there. It is sad that I am unable to find the equivalent in America, but it is not my fault – I blame others, those with power, those who set the standards by which we live, our institutions, our schools. We haven't honoured our past, and therefore have marginalized many people (artists especially), we've "dumbed down" our educational system (children can't read they can't write they've no appreciation for what is fine and what is elegant in this world). Perhaps most importantly, we've lost what is human, devaluing what is joyful of life.

I find France to be a romantic, fascinating place, where creative expression and *joie de vivre*, not money, is king. As an American living in America, I can only find solace in the things of our

puts her own spin on what she believes being "French" means - but do not dare disagree with her or you are living in the world of *the French fantasy* and setting yourself up for attack. None of us can truly know what it means to be French, Spanish, South American or what have you unless you have lived in that environment. We can only emulate some of the obvious characteristics. To truly know the French is to LIVE there - not just visit every year.

Finally, there is nothing wrong with being a red-blooded American woman. Does that mean that we are total morons because we choose to read a current fiction writer as opposed to Proust or want to discuss current style trends instead of the political climate? I don't think so - that just doesn't mean we're as dumb or as interesting as a rock.

§ Monday, September 1, 2003. Labor Day. It's the last day of summer before Fall unofficially begins. What a torporous, apathetic summer it's been. But the new leaf has been turned, and I'm happy.

I'm ready for a whole new beginning, a whole new look – virtually speaking.

§ Tuesday, September 2, 2003. Julian and I spent the evening watching *Quartet*. How I wish that the Merchant-Ivory team had undertaken the making of this piece later in their career. While the costumes, exteriors and interiors are perfection, the sound is crude, as though dubbed on cheap equipment; the ambient track is particularly bad, sounding as though it were recorded at a constant level throughout – there is no subtlety, no realism.

Still! How amazing that one of Jean Rhys' novels came to life under the talented eyes of the Merchant-Ivory duo. In general, they "get it right". It would be wonderful if they were to film her other novels, even one. I nominate *After Leaving Mr. MacKenzie*.

Rhys' heroines live on the fringes of life, they are the disenfranchised, the obscure, the lost, the *have-nots* struggling to live a world of the *haves*. Misunderstood, beaten down by life, they go about as ghosts, wraiths who only seek a bit of comfort, of love in a world of cruel, mocking, sneering people. Their emotions swing between moments of giddy happiness, and suicidal despair. Often impassioned, their anger inevitably turns to depression, as they're unable to change their situation, nor "smash" their adversaries. In good literature, there is conflict, there is heartache, there are the stories of people trying to make their way in a harsh, difficult world. There is disappointment, there are sad endings, there is futility. I am ready to read Rhys' novels yet again – it is my panacea, my most potent of remedies.

§ Wednesday, September 3, 2003. The black cloud has passed. I am so relieved! I've escaped from the peasants and their pitchforks, the herd and their mob mentality. I've learned so much about people in the last week, how they operate. Perhaps I've been living in a dream world, but I'd honestly had no idea how truly horrible people can be, how they can lie. Women will kick your face in if given the chance. And I shan't try to mingle with the hot polloi any longer for I'm not for them, nor they for me.

The move to the cubicle farm is "on track" – how I hate this expression, but it seems so apt given the corporate context. Since our moving date was fixed, I've found myself resigned to my fate, like a cow in a feedlot. I take advantage of my remaining days, office door shut, radio on high, goofing off not a little. I can hear my office mates culling flies; every now and again there is

obsession, a comfortable shoe, a habit. And, these people *fascinated* me; there was so much grist generated for the mill. It was a petri dish, a social experiment. I kept thinking, maybe something interesting *will* happen – and sometimes it did (but not always intentionally).

I *did* meet some interesting people, some people I still call my friends, and there was enough scattered praise and acknowledgement that I believed, stupidly I'll admit, that I should stick around, that my company was valued, that they *enjoyed* me. But this was egotism on my part. Really, what these *ladies* wanted, what they craved, was the adult equivalent of *My Little Pony* –Audrey Hepburn movies, Diane Johnson novels, Monet prints. I was completely at odds with them; I was all *La maman et la putain*, Zola novels, and Kiki de Montparnasse.

My exit, I thought, was brief, graceful, and to the point:

Cher tous,

It's time I moved on. This list has evolved into one where hair care, skin care, closet contents, and shopping are discussed more than anything else. In my opinion, it's turned into a "general" beauty discussion list with a slight French accent. While I understand why most of you enjoy it, I've been feeling for awhile that this is not the best place for me; I'd prefer to discuss ideas rather than things.

While I could complain that we don't keep to topics having to do with the French and French culture, I sense that this opinion would be unpopular, so I will gracefully exit.

Good luck to all of you. I will miss some of you dearly. Do keep in touch if you'd like.

Thanks for everything.

I couldn't have asked for a better reply to illustrate perfectly what I was up against (and am up against, in general):

Hello everyone,

I am and have been a lurker for some time now - going from no mail, to digest and back. However, I feel that I must comment on this post.

My initial reaction to this *Adieu* post was good riddance. Please let me explain. Although I have found many of her posts to be interesting, I feel her attitude detracts from the message she may be trying to impart on the group. She just tries too damn hard to be viewed as an intellectual bohemian. It's old and tired.

Between her posts on this group as well as her website, she has some obvious problems in dealing with people - she has said that many, many times herself. She attacks anyone who would dare admit to the group that they may be pretty, wealthy, wanting to be attractive to the opposite sex, interested in someone or something which she feels is beneath her - I could go on but I'm sure you know what I mean. Based on reading her diatribe on her website, she is a very sad and unhappy person who just cannot connect with other people, **ESPECIALLY** women. She complains incessantly about her lack of money, having to work X number of jobs, etc.

I have found her husband's posts to be blatantly racist (i.e. refers to African Americans that he encounters in San Francisco as "Negroes.") If you lived in New Zealand, fine - that word is still used to describe African Americans. But a person who claims to be an intellectual living in San Francisco? Sorry, unacceptable.

I am the child of two foreign service interpreters and have had the good fortune to live all over the world and please let me tell you that despite claiming to *really know* the French, she

past, because whatever "*joie de vivre*" our culture had, if we *ever* had it, existed more then, than it does now. Value in creative expression which hasn't been sullied by big business, by \$\$\$\$ is rare – if there isn't money to be made, by one's music, painting, writing, film, whatever, it's deemed untouchable, negligible, it's ignored. There is no such thing as "art for art's sake" in this country at the mainstream level. No one wants to waste their time.

§ **Wednesday, August 13, 2003.** We've been asked to contribute to an office recipe book. At first I balked, as I normally do to *group* activities, but then I started to think that it might be fun after all. Why not share one of my own personal recipes? It will certainly contribute to my reputation.

Here's what I submitted, verbatim:

The recipe I have especially chosen for your dining pleasure is called **Boeuf Daube Medieval**. This is my own, original, recipe was inspired by a visit to Chateau Montresor. It is a congenial dish, which begs for hearty camaraderie, and a strong dash of courtliness. The ingredients, along with the preparation instructions I've artfully arranged below.

Ingredients:

2 pounds cubed (1 1/2 inch) Chateaubriand
 2 T butter
 4 T olive oil
 Two cups of flour
 Salt
 Pepper
 1/2 cup diced white onion
 1/2 cup diced celery
 1/2 cup diced carrot
 2 cups good chicken broth, canned is fine
 2 cups good red wine like Pinot Noir
 2 cups freshly squeezed orange juice
 1 T dried thyme (French thyme is possible)
 1 T dried rosemary
 1 clove freshly grated nutmeg
 1 t ground allspice
 1 t ground clove
 3/4 cup frozen or fresh peas
 8 oz fresh French green beans, trimmed
 8 oz fresh baby carrots, trimmed
 1 pound extra wide egg noodles

Instructions:

- 1) Dredge the beef cubes in flour, which has been seasoned with salt and pepper. Set aside.
- 2) In a very large, lidded, heavy saucepan (5 x 16), melt the butter and olive oil over a medium heat. When hot, added the floured beef several cubes at a time and brown well. Remove browned beef from oil and set aside.

3) Put diced onion, celery, and carrots into the saucepan and sauté for 10-15 minutes over a low heat. Be careful that the mixture does not burn. Add 2 T of flour from the dredging mixture during the last 5 minutes to create a sort of roux. Stir well so that the flour absorbs and mixes well with the oil and vegetable mixture.

4) Add broth, wine, and orange juice, thyme, rosemary, nutmeg, and clove to the pan. De-glaze the bottom of the pan thoroughly. Stir mixture completely so that the flour dissolves completely into the liquid. Bring back to just boiling, then turn down to a simmer.

5) Carefully add browned beef cubes and any collected juices back to the pot. Cover, and simmer VERY slowly for at least two hours. Check the heat every 15 minutes or so, stirring to circulate and keep mixture from sticking or burning at the bottom of the pan.

6) When the mixture has simmered for 1 1/2 hours, add the carrots and stir. 15 minutes later, add the green beans and peas. Let the mixture cook another 15 minutes then serve over cooked *al dente* noodles in large, flat, bowls.

Notes:

This meal is best prepared in fall or winter. Though not strictly medieval, use your best silverware and table linens. I feel sure that medieval man would have done had he silver chest and linen drawer. So much more elegant than knife and shirt sleeve, don't you agree?

To facilitate the medieval mood, light a roaring fire using oak logs, and a plecthona, beeswax candles in silver candelabra. Medieval music CDs like, "Music of Medieval France," or "Music for a Medieval Banquet," will help to give you that essential Loire Valley Chateau atmosphere without the prohibitive cost of hiring period musicians.

For flowers, one can't go wrong with roses. I prefer vast quantities of white heirloom cabbage roses cut low in silvered bowls placed nonchalantly about the room.

With this main course I recommend a cunning Pinot Noir, or other insolent red served in generous goblets with silver filigree.

For a first course, I recommend a salad of fennel, orange, goat cheese, and walnut, with a walnut oil & blood orange vinegar dressing, served on unpretentious, yet elegant salad plates. To drink, a dry champagne served in red flutes.

For dessert, pomegranate sorbet with mint. To drink, a dry champagne in clear flutes.

Wrap up the evening's festivities with song, poetry, charades, and dancing. When the chapel bell strikes midnight, kisses all round, and then to bed – sing as a bug.

§ Thursday, August 14, 2003. I've been in a rut, mental and physical. How I hate it when this happens. And I've decided to take action – I need a make-over.

I arrived at the University this afternoon, dressed, *perfumed*, in good spirits. I'd just finished watching *Enchanted April* with Julian, goggling over the dresses, gasping at the dreamy beauty of Italy. I wore a fringed shawl much like those wore throughout the film by Lady Caroline Desier, embroidered with flowers, my espadrilles, and a simple, tea length, black knit sheath. Yes, I was in good spirits, quite unlike myself last week, and ready for change. Oblivious to Stanley and his eavesdropping, I called Artists and Poets to make an appointment – Colour with Arthur and Cut with Jacques next Thursday at noon. I'm athrill.

I'm tired of my hair. I'm sick of it. I hate it. I've been growing it for years. It is long, and it doesn't look bad, but I desperately need something more modern, more 1920s and less 1900. While long hair suits me, short hair suits me more. I'm lucky I guess – I can wear my hair anyway I'd like, but look ghastly as a blond. Yes, short dark hair is for me, and I'm going to get an Amélie cut, but how to communicate this to Jacques? And what of my Parisian backdrop?

§ Sunday, August 31, 2003. For the last several years I've been a member of one of those stupid Yahoo. groups: this one for "Francophiles". You know, the ones where everyone takes everything far too seriously, and devotes *way* too much time? Sadly, I did – guiltily as charged: foolish I know, and I've thrown in the towel. Well, in all honesty, I was run out of town by peasants brandishing pitchforks and torches.

I'll admit that I was a little sad to leave the *congenital* group. I had thought I'd made a few friends; it was a comfort of sorts, a way to pass the time. But it was time to leave, and a relief I guess. I was spending far too much of my time keeping up with posts, and one must channel one's energies in a productive way. And then, I didn't fit in very well (hence the rakes and torches.) As someone snidely pointed out, I've a problem fitting in, like a stray puzzle piece tossed into the wrong box. But is this a crime? I was, mostly, misunderstood. I guess my ideas sounded kinda crazy, or as one thoughtful *lady* tactfully said, my discussions were "meaningless." Meaningless.

Of course, this type of *persecution* has been a problem for many artists, and I comfort myself a little, perhaps foolishly, with these thoughts as I run from this mob. I think of Baudelaire and his antagonists. I'm no Baudelaire, but I suffer, too, contrary to what many might believe. It's no fun to be mocked, made fun of, derided, insulted, ignored. The *sheeple* think me rude; I get too "personal." My intelligence and arguments are seen as attacks on *their* values, *their* ways of thinking, *their* lifestyles. Do I not have the right to speak freely? To express myself?

This group I belonged to, a forum for Francophiles, turned into a common coffee klatch, a hen party. A place to brag about Mercedes Benzes and Kelly bags, to justify an SUV and a McMansion. France to them was an abstract notion, a cheap symbol: pink poodle dogs, Eiffel towers, berets, "oh-la-la" – a fuzzy-edged poster, a tourist's night out in Montmartre, a sweatshirt with FRANCE emblazoned across the front in sequins. It was a figment, a stereotype: "An American in Paris", "French Kitty", french toast.

And in the end, who am I to say that discussing skin creams, hairspray, and lipstick isn't important? "Can one wear white shoes after Labor Day?" "How can I tame my fine, brittle hair?" Aren't questions like this valid, fun, and worthwhile? Sure it *is*, for *them*. Let's face it kids, I crashed the wrong party, and I was ruining it for these *ladies* – there I was, standing in the corner with my face to the wall ranting about "high context vs. low context", "should women dress to please themselves or to please men?", "the importance of education and *inner* self-improvement" *ad nauseum* (you know, all that "important" stuff), while they wanted to debate the merits of Damon over Yopait. They wanted to know what to make for dinner with "Frenchy" hair (But don't get too weird on us with the *lapin*, and the *escargot*, and the *tête de veau*, *s'il vous plait*), and how to wear a garter belt. They discussed, with utmost seriousness, the organization of their closets, and the washing of their clothes. They wanted to know how to incorporate a little "red" into their wardrobe, and where to buy brand X hair-spray.

Yes, I felt like I was married, and I wanted a divorce. I'd sign off each day thinking to myself, "How I *loathe* these people. They're *so* awful. I *must* get away from them", but it had become an

Julian, they have real talent. Me, I fear my writing is filled with clichés and the observations, the *reflections* of a woman with arrested development – I should have been doing this long ago. I fear my writing to be juvenile, common, and ultimately stupid.

Of course, it doesn't help that I've shown it to Mother. I've shown her my, and Julian's writings for B——, *inviting*, expecting her derision. Why do I do this to myself? And while I've long been aware that Mother seeks to undermine my confidence at every turn (she always has), I still tell her, I still give her every opportunity to show me that I've been wrong, that she *can* be objective, that finally, *yes*, I've won her respect and admiration. Or is it *really* that I'm so muddling at all I attempt to do?

And it's not that she's unable to see the virtuosity, the beauty, the intelligence, the talent in others. At every turn she's sought to make it clear to me how *good* my brother Josh is at writing (I didn't even *know* he wrote), how *beautiful*, *thin*, and *sweet* his wife Maria is. How charming her neighbors are. How clever her friend's children. Me? I'm certainly *not* clever, nor am I charming. I will always be too fat; even at 5'8" and 120 pounds she called me *matronly* in front of my friends. My clothing, that I take such pains over, is "too affected", while "something ought be done about [my] hair." And now, my writing is judged "too flowery and confusing. If I picked up a novel and read a first paragraph like yours, I would read no more of it. There are just too many adjectives, Lucie."

A peek at *Writer's Digest* at the Public Library last Sunday amused me at first, but later sent me into another bout of self-doubt. It's not that *Writer's Digest* proved me a *bad* writer, but that I was suddenly struck by the fact that *so many* people want to write, and wish to make a professional go at it. I don't, not really, well ... , of course it would be nice to be published; it would be legitimatising in a way, but there are so many who do, and work *very* hard at it. It is the sheer number of people doing what I do that has discouraged me. By nature I hate, I detest doing what others wish to do, but wasn't it naïve of me to think that there were so few of us? And that the few of us who existed were writing sheerly for self-expression, for purely artistic reasons? That we cared nothing for writing a best seller, and that we shunned the lucrative writing of genre fiction?

Finally, here are my peers, Carmella, Andrew, Julian, and now James from upstairs, all with a talent I don't possess, all with a seriousness of purpose, skillful tricks, and wise goals. My friends and my heroes really *work* at what they do. It is difficult to write well; it is not just a piddling about with fancy pens and expensive notebooks, a romantic and dreamy dabbling in letters, as I've just coined as 19th-Century Syndrome, and while I don't compare myself with her, there is such a stark contrast that I can't help but gasp at her promise, as I grimace at my own.

On the other hand, my dear Carmella attends writer's workshops led by established, well-respected leaders in creative writing. She's in touch with, and is stimulated by, modern literary trends, loves modern literature, whereas I ignore it. Consequently, my writing suffers from what I've just coined as 19th-Century Syndrome, and while I don't compare myself with her, there is such a stark contrast that I can't help but gasp at her promise, as I grimace at my own.

Julian's writing, which Mother loves, which I *adore*, is perfectly simple, beautiful, and phrased. He has a stunning talent at taking the mundane and making it seem somehow more interesting than it really is. I marvel at our lives as he has written them – they seem so much more *glamorous* than they really are. He's a natural gift for humor. He understands simplicity; the power of terse, exact words, highlighted, *punctuated* with an unexpected turn of phrase or rarely used word. He

get away with the vintage look when I was younger, as one gets older one runs a real danger of looking just plain dowdy, like an *old* person in *old* clothes. And while I'm not what one could call "old", I'm not in my first bloom of youth either. So, last spring, when a couple of smart-mouthed boys pointed at me and laughed uproariously, "Hey look! There goes your *Grandma*!", I knew it was time for a decent coat, a *new* coat.

The new coat is a Max Mara black double breasted alpaca coat – the "Garbo". How aptly named it is! *"I want to be alone!"* Calf length, it is deconstructed, generous, with a very wide collar and cuffs. Very, very 1920s, exactly what I was looking for – in it, I feel like I'm wrapped up in a blanket, but not as if I were actually wearing one – an important distinction. It's on the thin side, and light, but will be very warm and snugly; it's not at all "puffy" or bulky. Being *very* difficult to please, I consider myself lucky to have found something that I *adore*; I am a very, very tough customer. Now, if it would just get cold enough for me to wear it; I can't bear to wait a month or more!

Following the coat splurge I stopped in at the new Diptyque boutique. It's funny how dropping \$\$\$*on coats suddenly makes you feel giddy* *enough to buy whatever the hell you feel like buying*. *Imean, why not? It's not like you're going to set you back that much further, right?* [Here I am justifying things, albeit in a totally twisted and peculiar way.] What did I buy? A Bois Cîrè candle, a Jean Galliano signature candle (Frankincense, Myrrh, Firewood), Baies room spray, l'Ombre dans l'eau soaps (black-currant leave and Bulgarian rose), and Mariage Frères Earl Grey tea. Is this becoming at all obscene? But I *need* these things!

On to Nordstrom where I found the perfect black and jade green silk "pajama" set, ideal for cocktail parties, and evenings at home with friends, a black cashmere sweater with bell sleeves with Mongolian lamb collar and cuffs, a silk and wool black 3/4 length skirt, edged with an aqua/copper/scarlet Burnese motif and a substantial knotted fringe, a trim black turtleneck in cashmere, and finally, an Alberto Makali knit top in a muted melee of black, cream, fuchsia, and Capri blue. Ka-ching! – \$\$\$\$. Shopping certainly is *exhilaratory*, is it not?

Did I stop? No, siree Bob I did not. I jauntily marched into Jacqueline Perfumery to buy *une grande bouteille de Bal à Versailles*. Yes, Madame, the *large* bottle. No Madame, not the eau de toilette, but the *parfume* – yes, we want plenty of perfume so as to keep Stanley's olfactory glands well primed. And speaking of Stanley, I stopped my shopping spree only because it was time to get myself to the University, shopping bags in hand, eye's atwinkle, a little giddy. Now that I've calmed down a little, I think I can keep out of the stores for another six months. Did I tell you I only shop twice a year? Surely that makes up for one day's splurge, doesn't it?

§ Wednesday, September 17, 2003. Wednesdays at lunch I'm always listening to KFJC. Wednesdays it's the alternative country western show – yes, there is such a thing. I keep it turned down low, I'm not a big country western fan, but I like it on for company, and it reminds me, however ironically, that I *am* a westerner.

When I was a kid I used to watch the T.V. program Hee-Haw, a program only a kid could love. I liked the dumb jokes, I liked Buck Owens and the Buckaroos. I even liked Roy Clark – I thought there was something kind of handsome about him, in a childish, non-threatening way. As a kid I wanted to live on a ranch, drive a pick-up truck, tame wild horses, live the life of a Howdy-Doody cowgirl, all "come and get it" roast beef, fire side homilies, and Hee-Haw bonhomie.

My best friend, Karen Zimmermann, would loyally watch Hee-Haw with me, but preferred the granddaddyerly Andy Williams. I'd spend the night often at Karen's where we'd stay up all night listening to her Andy Williams albums, "Isn't he cute?" she'd ask? I'd dittoously agree, but preferred her Three Dog Night and Doobie Brothers 45s ("*Jesus is just all-right with me! Jesus is just all-right oh yeah!*"). In junior high we drifted apart, Karen becoming the nice young Christian girl, while I meandered in the other direction – I remember the defining moment as the evening I lachdashatically accompanied her on one of her church youth group outings: I ducked into a record store to buy Deep Purple's "Burn" and Black Sabbath's "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath", while she waited obediently by the youth group bus.

I was never baptized, nor were my family church goers. Over the years I attended church services or Sunday school here and there – Mother played Bach fugues at the Episcopal church for extra dough, friends would drag me along on some "excursion" or another – I'd go out of curiosity and a childish need to fit in – I desperately wanted to fit in; my family's fervid atheism was but one thing that set me apart.

Mother was divorced, a single working Mother at a time when most were stay-at-home "moms". She drove a French car, a Renault, in the day when a gargantuan American land yacht was the norm, and a foreign car was an oddity, something to be looked upon with suspicion. And our lawn, the most outward and immediate sign of one's social caste in suburbia was dichondra – "What is this *stuff*?" our neighbors would ask, a little outraged, a little outraged, as though we were growing some sort of commie-pinko contraband. Why couldn't we be like the others who grew crab-crass peppered with dandelions, the most middle-class and American of lawn staples.

I was sent to school with a lunch box (the others insouciantly carried theirs in brown paper bags), cheese sandwich, chips, apple. Ho-ho. No matter how much I insisted that the other girls wore pants and sneakers, Mother petulantly bought me dresses and Mary-Janes. August, she'd tote me down to a children's emporium in Tustin, quite past it's heyday, where the aged sales ladies would clasp their hands and insist that I was lovely as I sulked and moped in my new fall ensemble. Mother would yank and pinch my arm, hissing into my ear (but within earshot of the sales ladies, who would politely turn half-a-face, one varicose eye still spying) that I was an ungrateful, petulant, spoiled child, that I was to be properly dressed, and that she didn't care what the other children wore. "Did I want to look just like a boy?" This always baffled me, because of course I didn't want to "look just like a boy", but neither did I want to call unnecessary attention to myself with lace ankle socks and colourful frocks. Mother, obliviously or maliciously, was an ally of my childish tormentors.

I suffered. I was teased. I was always picked last for the team, after the fat kid, after the cross-eyed simperer, after the weird little darling who picked his nose. I was the sulky, standoffish, defiant girl, the creepy girl who stubbornly refused to "just try!" I was a freckle-faced Wednesday Addams with braces. I lusted their games, which to me seemed pointless, cruel, and undignified. At recess I'd sneak away to the far end of the athletic field where I'd sit indian fashion, alone, picking at the grass, singing cowboy songs, dreaming of the day when I'd escape on my white stallion, Pegasus.

But escape was a long way off I fear, a lot farther than the week end or summer vacation. Mother was a Martha Stewart perfectionist with Mommie Dearest roller-coaster emotions. Saturday mornings I'd awake to the sound of the vacuum banging against my door, my signal to get up and get busy; if there were a toy out of place, all of it, the contents of drawers and closets would

recognition by his peers, "To Paul, with much love and courage – Edmund White."

Jumbled with files, a mass of publicity stills – Paul doing his best to appear literary, gazing directly at the camera, an intent look in his eye, a pair of sad little wire-rimmed glasses held contemplatively in one hand, a library of forlorn literary rubbish a backdrop. I find the same photograph on a stack of dust jackets waiting to envelope forgotten novels in an unopened box in the closet.

§ Monday, October 20, 2003. The back door, through which everyone comes and goes at the office, constantly, is perpetually clicking open, then clicking shut. Click click ... click click. The door opens by one of those horizontal push bars, there it goes again. Click click ... click click. Jesus. I've asked each person in our department, "Doesn't that door sound bother you?" After a cock of the head and a moment of contemplation each looked at me earnestly and said, "No. No, I never notice it. I've never noticed it." They all think I'm crazy.

Buffy, Joe Takapu and I were all hovering round the hot water dispenser in the "kitchen" this morning. Joe had a plate full of cupcakes to which he'd helped himself. "I see you have a plate full of treats", I said. Buffy, ever the annoying, perky, busy-body chimed in, "Beth Berkowitz made those. She *really* knows how to celebrate Halloween." How stupidly banal. She then stood and stared at me; I could see her from the corner of my eye as I filled my tea cup with hot water. "So how are you?" I turned my body so that she faced my back. "Just fine, thank-you." When will she *ever* learn to leave me alone? God I hate her.

There is an office policy that nothing in our cubicles is to "stick up" above the cube walls. I've a thin wire, an antenna, I use for my radio, which is taped to the top of my cube. Every morning when I come in, it's been squashed down. Someone is coming around and mashing it so that it won't "stick up" above the cubicle wall. I can't *believe* that anyone even noticed it – it's almost invisible. I worry that my new rubber tree will have its top leaves cut since they too "stick up" above the cubicle walls.

Julian and I stayed up past midnight last night, investigating all the college towns of the Midwest. Sizing up crime statistics, looking at houses and housing prices, evaluating which towns we could live in, which have potential. Lafayette and Bloomington, Indiana, Bloomington, Illinois, Iowa City, Lincoln and Omaha, and of course, Lawrence. All these towns have our beloved little bungalows, lots of large trees, and universities of some size. It all makes me fearful, yet hopeful that our lives could get better.

§ Monday, November 3, 2003. Finally, after two weeks of inactivity, I've mustered up the energy and the courage to write again. So much of what I've been doing, so much of what I've been exposed to these last days has been discouraging. While there has been much to write about, I've not had the confidence, nor the necessary time for rumination, nor the space for writing. Missing my old office constantly, its darkness, its seclusion, its quietude, I *must* adapt to my new space, for if I'm to do any writing at all, it must be here, mornings, in my cubicle.

But what has been most discouraging, really (not the new office situation), has been the writings of my peers and heroes. That, coupled with my sudden cognizance of the massive numbers of people who aim to write, to *be* writers, to be *successful* writers, inspires me to naught but to shun my own journal, and other, more serious writing projects altogether. Carnella, Andrew,

Yes, it's true. I love to watch QVC. But let me qualify this unwholesome activity, if I may: I *never* shop QVC. I view QVC as *entertainment*. QVC is a window into the world of American normalcy, something which I know very little of, and yet, am extremely interested in, much as *they* might be interested in the lives of my decadent friends and city-mates. Watching QVC is sociology, voyeurism, a source of strange half-cognizant daydreams of what my life would be like had I joined the Young Republicans and married a "nice young lawyer", as my Mother urged me to do.

And then, there is something strangely comforting about QVC, which I can't explain. QVC hurls me, it hypnotizes me. There is never a harsh word or look, there is no ugly reality, all is soft focus, a happy, contented world, where there are panaceas for any and all ills; should you want your life to be seamless, perfect, all white teeth and good hair days, QVC is your answer. The testimonials say it all; women with voices like aged bar-fies call in to gush, cigarette in one hand, a glass of cheap bourbon in the other, blearily raving about how wonderful product X is, how with product X's help, they look slimmer and feel smarter, their husbands love them more, their children's grades have improved, and darn it, product X just makes them happy. The caller is congratulated for her impeccable taste, the presenter is complemented on her beauty and kindness, and it's just all just one big happy orgy of 24 hour, non-stop materialism.

I especially love the holiday specials which run during the fall, programs which feed people's desire to concoct a "perfect" holiday *experience* for their family and "friends." The *presenters*, the salespeople, know how to play upon people's emotions, perfectly, but in all fairness, I think the products really sell themselves. People will buy *anything* it seems, even scary snowmen lit up by fibre optics in shades of yellow, red, blue, and fuchsia. Had this thing been in our house, it would have frightened me, it would have given me nightmares. Oh, how I *love* the holidays.

§ Sunday, October 19, 2003. Julian and I spent yesterday going through Paul Reed's books and papers. I feel as though I've inhaled an unhealthy dose of dust and god knows what else; my lungs feel loaded, my sinuses ache, my body hurts from a day of shifting books about and pawing through boxes of bills, receipts, and letters – the detritus of a life. It's all so sad, that someone's life amounts to just this: three boxes of files, an unwanted library of book-club editions, a sad little pair of wire-rimmed glasses, an urn of ashes stored in a bureau drawer.

We met Paul only twice; both times he was *very* ill, shockingly ill, emaciated, though still tenaciously clinging to life, dragging a diapered body and an IV drip through the Market street house he shared with Kenneth and Philippe. He seemed irritable on meeting us; I can't blame him. We were invaders, clearly unwanted, unneeded, though we stayed out of sight, and stayed not for so very long. I wonder, had he known we'd be pawing through his personal papers, would he have felt differently? Or found our presence to be even more disagreeable? Yesterday, with Paul's things scattered about, I felt again like an intruder, the dust in my mouth, in my nose, Paul's distaste at my presence.

A careful, diligent record keeper, a Victorian clerk with cramped but legible printings, his appointments were carefully noted and checked-off in date books, his expenses duly recorded in spiral bound notebooks, his bills stamped PAID, the amount circled and dated on every bill – The Franklin Library, Book-of-the-Month Club, The Mystery Guild. His book royalties were minuscule (\$16.34, February 1 through March 1, 1999), his file of rejection letters weightier than his literary work. He financed his own publications, boxes of which still sit in a closet, unopened and forsaken. But amongst the dusty reaches of his library were *some* happy surprises, some welcome scraps of

be flung in to a heap, Mother foaming at the mouth, her face an angry, frightening blur. Later, my room put in order, I'd be ordered outside equipped with a paring knife, to pull weeds, a Sisyphusian task; the refined, over-bred didiondra was no match for the scrappy, snot-nosed crab-grass and dandelions. Evenings, at table, my head hanging low to hide my tears (a common enough occurrence; what would dinner *be* without tears?), I'd pick at my frozen vegetables and "Swiss" steak, praying that Mother would turn her belittlement and criticism on my brother, Harold. She never did. "Someday I'll show her! Someday I'll show her!"

§ Monday, September 22, 2003. Carmella has left for New York. She sent me an e-mail Sunday to report that her, "... NYC hair cutter wants to charge between \$220-270 just to do the basics!" Ah, the lifestyles of the rich and famous. I was unable to see Carmella before she left Saturday; Guy took ill and she needed to be at his side. Guy is so very delicate, though I wonder if his condition was aggravated knowing that Carmella would be a continent away for several weeks.

With Guy unwell and Carmella busy attending to his needs, we attended Kenneth's party Friday night. It wasn't at all dreadful (steak cubes and samosas). There were some hipsters there to distract me from the "suits", but they were of the stupid variety one finds so many of in Mission district coffee houses:

Me: So who are your favorite American authors?

Hipster Uno: [*Flipping through Don Delillo's Underworld*] Faulkner.

Me: Why?

Hipster Uno: [*Looking a little bemused because he's now expected to be clever and ironic*] Because he compels me to turn the pages. I hate it when people recommend authors, it just turns me against them.

Me: [*Then? Which "them"?*] Well, I won't mention any names then.

Hipster Dos: [*Gleefully*] I haven't read a book in five years!

Hipster Uno: You need to start reading man. Why not this? [*Shakes Delillo at him*]

Hipster Dos: I only read nonfiction, man.

Me: You haven't read a book in *five* years? But do you read anything? The newspaper?

Hipster Dos: [*A little annoyed*] Well, *of course* I read the newspaper, the New York Times ...

Hipster Uno: He has dubious politics ...

Hipster Dos: [*A little angrily*] I don't have *dubious* politics! What do you *mean*, I have *dubious* politics?

Relieved that these two had turned on each other, I left the room only to witness an even more daft conversation:

Fogie: ... Oh yeah? Well I saw the Sex Pistols when they played the Fillmore in '79.

Fogette: I saw Led Zeppelin in '76. [*Crowd oohs, and awus, Fogiette looks victorious*]

Fogie: [*One-upping Ms. Fogiette*] I partied with Nirvana ...

Fogette: [*Annoyed*] What, do you mean needles, or what?

Fogie: ... Oh no! This was *pre-Courtney* ...

Christ. Who *are* these people?

Kenneth and Philippe had three T.V.s going simultaneously, all which played Parker Posey films, *The House of Yes*, *Kicking and Screaming*, and *Clockwatchers*, that classic film about temps working in a dumb-ass cubicle environment – the dragging minutes, trying to “look busy”, eking out what little *jote de mere* they can from a stupid, sterile, corporate grind stone, just as I will be doing in two short weeks. I can relate. I’m cubicle number *D3* by the way. I’m pleased to see that Kenneth and Philippe are also Parker Posey fans. Regrettably we weren’t able to socialize much with them before we dashed off to see Woody Allen’s new film at the Metreon. I felt like a bad guest, eating, then running.

There are two loud mouthed women outside my office right now having a ridiculously high volume conversation – they are using their “outdoor” voices to discuss a glitch in the accounting software – just kill me now. Didn’t anyone ever *tell* them that when indoors, one should use their “indoor” voice? Is everyone going deaf? God help us. ... Oh yeah, God is dead.

Bring alive is so difficult sometimes, for all of us. I feel TERRIBLE today. Monday. It’s been wretchedly hot, in the 90s; last night we couldn’t sleep, so we stayed up watching the BBC’s production of “Middlemarch” – *pas mal de tout*. This morning *au travail* I feel dreadful, really awful. A breakfast “sandwich” and cold coffee from Briazz helped a bit, but what I really need is ten hours of uninterrupted, snugg sleep in a freezing cold room with blackout curtains. At least, at work, there is air-conditioning.

I accompanied Julian to the Public Library Sunday to read magazines and loll about in the park. I’ve decided that the stripiest magazine is *Glamour*, which despite its title, and high-falutin’ British spelling is anything but glamorous. Full of dubious statistics (“’21

§ Wednesday, September 24, 2003. The jackhammers began this morning at 9:30. It was time I got up anyway. They’re still at it as I write. There was a time, I guess it was the ‘70s, when noise pollution was considered to be a serious threat. This “awareness” has dissipated, sadly. I can’t believe the wanton noise we’re subjected to everyday, and I wonder if anyone even notices anymore? When I blithely state, “Are they all deaf?” I am serious – *they* must be.

Walking by Macy’s last night, I saw that they’ve replaced the blasting Duran Duran with a blasting, endlessly looped commercial for some gawd-awful new scent, and when I say “blasting”, I mean it was really “blasting”, fighting really, with the cacophony from Union Square, some “Hong Kong” thing. How can Macy’s get away with this? Are there no ordinances? And more importantly, has Macy’s no sense of good taste? Or of community responsibility? Suppose every store on Union Square blasted music or commercials into space? What then? Is this what life is coming too? Will we soon be tortured with commercials blasting on public transportation, from transportation? I mean, *pourquoi pas?*

It wouldn’t be so bad if at home I could find some peace and quiet, but I cannot. There are the incessant buses, and most especially the cars going by on O’Farrell with deafening rap music, “plat beats” rumbling from their trunks like some sort of doomsday soundtrack caught in a can. The tones are so low as to penetrate my entire viscera, even with windows shut tight – there goes one now. These cretins set off car alarms with their “music” as they make their way toward some hellish destination, to the consternation of everyone else (or is everyone deaf?) I should think they find this most amusing; they don’t care for, nor consider our discomfort, nonetheless. How can

to see, where she walked, all the quotidian details that I normally would leave out as I expect that they bore the reader – but no? I really wonder....

There’s nothing in the house to eat, as usual, only a refrigerator full of condiments; I hunched on leftover Pringles and Western Family onion dip. I had made iced tea in an old gallon milk bottle yesterday, so at least I had something decent to drink. Can you believe my epicurean life? You’ll be relieved to know that I’ve left word with Julian to pick up some pasta and tomato sauce on his way home so that we won’t be left gnawing our own arms at dinner.

The cable’s been out all day, so I’ve not been kept company as I work by TCM, my background “music” of choice. I did take note however, before the blue screen of death, that there was to be a proliferation of Wallace Beery films today, so perhaps it’s not so great a loss. And there is much to be said for silence, *city* silence I should say. As I write I can hear a dog barking, the traffic on O’Farrell, and what sounds like someone dragging a manhole cover somewhere nearby.

Later, I’ll get into the tub. I like to be *in* the tub when Julian walks in the door at 5:30. I don’t know why. Perhaps I believe that it helps to portray me as a lady of leisure, spending my days primping for my lord and master, perfumed, powdered, ready.

§ Thursday, October 16, 2003. It’s been a busy week, too busy to do anything but concentrate on what is immediately in front of my face. Next, a date this evening at Kenneth’s South-of-Market pad to discuss the archiving and website development projects he proposed last week.

It *was* odd. This morning, leaving our building, we were discussing Kenneth and this evening’s festivities in the elevator. When the doors opened onto the lobby, who should we see, standing there with one hand behind his back, looking rather Napoleon-esque, but Kenneth. We all exchanged pleasantries and see-you-laters before rushing off to our respective appointments, Kenneth looking a little uncomfortable, not a little like a deer caught in the headlights. I often get the queer feeling that he can’t wait to get away from us whenever we meet him in public – surely this is my paranoia working against me yet *again*. I chuckle weakly, but also consider a telephone call to the psychiatrist.

I didn’t have the chance to swim this afternoon. Consequently, I’m feeling like quite the lodgey tub following an earlier lunch at the Pine Crest Diner (club sandwich, no fries, small bowl of split-pea soup), and a recently eaten bean burrito – my stratagem against possible hunger later at Kenneth and Philippe’s. While they’ve promised pizza, I don’t want to depend on it actually being there, or indeed, being something that I’d eat. The last time they ordered pizza, it was topped with proscuitto. I wasn’t able to eat much. Henceforth, my early evening pre-“dinner” burrito will be a routine before evening visits to see Kenneth and Philippe.

But what I really wanted to get at, what I really wanted to confess, is that I’ve been eating a steady diet of crap all week, and I feel absolutely ill. It’s so *damned* difficult to shop well when there’s an abundance of free time, and when there’s a dearth, it’s simply *impossible*. Consequently, I’ve been dining badly, on foodstuffs I can’t even mention, I dare not mention: it’s too, too mortifying. But that’s not all *mes amis*. When I’m overworked, as I am at the moment, I’m highly prone to the most statermly white trash behaviour, lying about on the couch, a well-dressed lump, covered by an antique velvet coverlet in Prussian blue, rapily viewing films like *House of Dark Shadows* (Oooh. Barnabas Collins!), and all together too much of QVC.

in San Francisco is cowering under a bed, while anyone with any sense, shakes his fists and curses the powers that be. How intelligent is it for a brace of screaming jets to be “diving and rolling” at mach 1 over a major metropolitan city? *Surely* this will end in tears someday. I just hope that I, and my loved ones, are still around for the mop-up.

We met Carmella and Guy for dinner last night at Café Claude. The food at Café Claude was *terrible*, but it was wonderful to see a sassy Carmella after her travels; and Guy is like a breath of fresh air after the oppressive Ted and ineffective Gwyneth.

Carmella looked *running* Saturday night, wearing a lime green turtle neck, her new chunky black glasses, and masses of jewelry. Guy is not at all like what I remember him to be, and it’s impossible for me to think of anyone he looks like so that I may give you a description, but he’s rather tall and thin, mustachioed, and has wavy brown hair. His eyes are mischievous, very intelligent. He’s witty, charming, very engaging – he’d make a marvelous D’Artagnan. Yes, he’s a musketeer. I’ve decided. Carmella has done very well for herself indeed. If only he weren’t so delicate. If only he hadn’t suffered so. He’s a bit broken after 70 hospital stays, and I wonder how his life will unfold?

Yes, it was nice to see Carmella, but she makes me a bit uneasy all the same. After complaining that she has no health insurance, and that she must get married, she turned to me and stage-whispered, “Lucie, I have to ask you something.” “Can I have lunch with Julian?” Of course I said yes, but what *is* she up to? Surely she doesn’t want to steal my husband for his health insurance and his paycheck? It would be more in character, I will admit, for her to say *exactly* this sort of thing to be merely provocative, and of course to annoy Guy. *Especially* to annoy Guy. Still, I find it mildly troublesome. Why should she, an unemployed artist want to go to lunch with a stable, highly paid bread-winner? Oh... My wild imagination and jealous nature *will not* get the better of me. Carmella is *not* Julian’s type, nor is he hers. And even if she were his type, I dare say her antics would put him off, and quickly. I remember the stories of Alan fleeing Carmella’s apartment in a panic, as she hurled crystal goblets of Chianti at him in a blind rage. And then there was the fire. We never knew if she had set it deliberately.

But *I’m* the crazy one you see. A paranoid narcissist if you *must* know. Carmella spent most of the evening begging me to move to Berkeley; she looked positively panicked when I said that we could be moving to the Midwest within a year – she doesn’t want *me* to leave. She clearly values me as a friend. So why my irrational fears? Why am I so suspicious? How I wish I didn’t have these beastly paranoid tendencies. And later, I suffer from awful feelings of guilt; how *could* I think such irrational and monstrous thoughts of my *friends*? Of course there is nothing to worry about. Am I so hopelessly impressionable? Do I need to have my input censored as would a child’s, so that I don’t have “bad dreams”?

Strangely, there is a part of me that should like them to go to lunch together, just to see that nothing would happen, as a sort of test of Julian’s love, as a test of Carmella’s friendship. I, in fact, relish this idea. And I *really* should like them to enjoy one another. I *really* should like them to form a bond, to have a friendship as well. How I *really* should like to be liberated and confident and *modern*, instead of worrying about my husband’s whereabouts like some sort of insecure, housebound, bourgeois, suburban *Hausfrau* – this is *not* what I should like to be at all.

§ **Monday, October 13, 2003.** As I read Anaïs Nin’s early journals I find that I enjoy most her descriptions of what she’s wearing, how she’s decorated her house, what plays she went

they get away with this? How is it that we’ve allowed our society to disintegrate to the point that the people who cause us the most pain are allowed to do what they like, while the rest of us cringe in silence lest we be beat upon or worse?

And how is it, that guys like “the bucket guy” are allowed to set up shop at the corner of Geary and Powell every evening, “singing” at the top of his lungs, banging on buckets while horrified tourists scramble by. What kind of image does this project about the city of San Francisco? That we’re “an asylum” being run by “inmates”? European cities have groups of real musicians posted about their cities, playing the ubiquitous Vivaldi, Miles Davis, Gypsy folk tunes, in other words, real music, real entertainment. There is some dignity, some elegance. We, on the other hand, can boast of a guy who beats on buckets (and badly), a guy who thinks he’s Jimmy Hendricks, who sets up camp at the corner of Market and Stockton with a ragtag group of Colt 45 swillin’ homeless maniacs, and finally, the cookie-tin guy who shuffles about with cookie tins strapped to his feet while he “plays” a harmonica – a one man “band”. Aren’t we the “world class” city!

Yesterday, at the University, I asked first Stanley, and then Cubeta, if “it would be possible to quit snapping your gum?” After blasting commercials from Macy’s, shuffling cookie tins, and viscera vibrating rap music, I can’t *take* gum snapping. They both apologized and stopped. “Ohhh! I didn’t realize I was doing that!” Yes Stanley, yes Cubeta, you’re both just chewing cud you see, eyes glazed over, busy at mindless tasks, dreaming of your vacation in Las Vegas, your dinner at Taco Bell – snap out of it, all of it, *all of you*.

Later, when Cubeta had left, and Stanley had disappeared, Herbert sidled over to me, and in utmost seriousness asked,

“Is there a rumor about me?”

“No.”

“Are you sure? Are you telling me the truth?”

“Is there supposed to be? Do you *want* there to be one?”

“I thought there was a rumor about me.”

“You seem disappointed, but if I hear anything, I’ll be sure to tell you.”

§ **Thursday, September 25, 2003.** Kenneth has written to ask if Julian and I would like to come over some evening soon to socialize, feeling bad that he wasn’t able to talk with us more at his party. I was terribly pleased by his note as I’d always wondered if he *really* liked us – I always just assume that people don’t like me, since they rarely do, and truth be told, I often think I feel more comfortable with being *disliked* rather than *liked*. As crazy as it sounds, it just feels more *normal*, somehow. Clearly, I need some therapy. We’ve set a date for next Thursday, October 2, at seven o’clock in the evening. I’m looking forward to it.

§ **Tuesday, September 30, 2003.** Carmella has returned from New York City, saying she had a fairly dull time of it; things have changed for the worse since 9/11. It’s as though the city had been kicked in the stomach and is still trying to catch it’s breath. We’ve rescheduled Café Claude for October 11th. We’re all keeping our fingers crossed.

I arrived at the University today to find Wanda back at work having been on “disability” for the last six months. Stanley complains that Wanda does nothing anyway; that she’s just a warm body in a cubicle. But who could blame her after working in a University dungeon for the last 30

years? I honestly don't see how people do it, that is, go to work, day after day, month after month, looking forward to their petty little two week vacation, x-ing off the days until the Christmas holidays – what a cheap deal. Who wouldn't be bored stiff, dead tired of the rat race at *any* job after so long, with nothing to show for it but middle-age-spread, Carpel Tunnel Syndrome, and an "employee of the month" certificate? I've never had the same job for more than eight years, and that was bloody intolerable - the oil refinery, I kid you not, I'm already sick to death of the grindstone and I'm far younger than Wanda.

Anyway, Wanda is back, and she's quite the unintentional comic. Today I overheard the following conversation between Stanley (another unknown comic) and Wanda, huddled together at her computer terminal in the corner:

"Ohhh, look at that! There's a pharmacy for sale in New Mexico. Do you want to buy a pharmacy in New Mexico Wanda?"

"New Mexico. Don't you have to be a citizen?"

"Of New Mexico?"

"Yeah, you have to be a citizen to buy a pharmacy there. *They* don't have to be a citizen to buy one here, but *we* have to be a citizen of New Mexico to buy one there."

Interesting. And I'm wondering exactly what she means by this, but don't dare point out her ignorance by delving a bit deeper, as circumlocutory and as veiled as it might be. Or is there something that *I* don't know?

I've found a job I should have in Iowa. Julian and I believe that we could be happier there, perhaps. We envision an adorable, *affordable* bungalow in our future, no more commuting, no more crap San Francisco neighborhood, no more insufferable public transportation replete with pushing, shoving, repulsive plebeians. How I'd love to saunter into work each day, a song in my heart, a smile on my lips, a ten minute walk, my lunch under my arm, sit under the old elm tree in our backyard, hear the crickets sing us to sleep each night, hunker down with a quilt and a cup of tea by a crackling fire while a heavy snow storm entertains us; marvel at the thunder, the lightning, the wind, the rain, the *drama* of meteorology!

San Francisco's weather is sadly dull, swinging from high fog to sunshine and back all year long – we're weather starved. And while there's no snow to shovel, no humidity, no threat of tornadoes, the unwavering seasons gives one the feeling that they're living in a bell jar, a sterile vacuum, preserved, a bit dusty, desiccated, something that should have been thrown out long ago. A change in seasons is stimulating. I should like a *real* autumn, a bit of snow in the winter, the thrill of spring, lazy summer days on the front porch with a pitcher of *citron pressé*.

And let's face it, California has had it. California is past it. I feel as though I'm going down on a captainless ship loaded with rats and ragtag riffraff, pushing, shoving, *grasping, money-grubbing*; I'm kicked in the face, shoved roughly aside as they, the rats and the riffraff, *force* their way up to a higher perch, any foothold will do, a place where their inevitable demise may be staved off, they think. All the while there is much shouting and gesturing that their friends may join them, their own ship having already sunk, without a thought as to what more rats, more ragtag riffraff means to a ship already listing dangerously, undoubtedly doomed.

Abandon ship! This job is a life raft of sorts, our bungalow, our deserted island. We must get out of here.

like the food, I assure myself that it's just too damn bad, and of course they may think my cooking sublime. There's no point in worrying about it.

So, Julian and I wonder why Ted and Gwyneth even like us, why they've actively sought us out, it's such a one sided relationship. Ted is always inviting Julian to lunch, courting him, while Julian lifts nary a finger. At first I thought that perhaps Ted had some sort of "infatuation" with Julian, but after meeting him I decided that no, this was not the case; Ted is as straight and narrow as they come. But Ted and Gwyneth had an only child, a son about Julian's age, who was killed several years ago. Clearly, with the lecturing, and the gifts, and the insistence *always* to pick up the check, Julian has, through no choice of his own, become the son they wish they still had, perhaps he's unwittingly become the son they wish they *had* had; the son who died was not a *good* son, rather an anti-intellectual, mulleted, racing hound, who drank and drugged his way through his youth, a disappointment to Ted and Gwyneth, over-educated, PBS watching, Berkeley types. It's no wonder that Julian feels odd. Strangely, I wouldn't if I were in his position. I've oft wished for surrogate parents, my own being my own cross to bear, my own disappointment, though they *are* interesting. How I wish they were rich. Does anyone really feel that they were born to the right family? I could have done worse, I suppose, much worse.

Gwyneth, whom I should not neglect, is sweet, maybe too sweet, passive, extremely docile, laughing muckly at Ted's crute comments, "I was a gentleman in college. I had *ideals*. I was surrounded by beautiful blonds, but I was a man of *principle*. Now, ah yes now, I would lay them all. But then? No. I was young, I had a *conscience*. I had *morals*." Julian and I nervously glanced at Gwyneth, who was laughing weakly, right on cue. Later, *chez nous*, I pulled Gwyneth into my dressing room to show her some of my antique jewelry, hoping I could alight the female spark. "Does he *allow* you to buy all this?" "Of course." I said. Does Ted keep her from spending her own earnings? I wondered? Putting her in my most extravagant pieces, I pulled her into the salon to show Ted, but he was unimpressed. "Doesn't she look beautiful?", I ventured, but Ted dismissed us with a wave of his hand, while some unintelligible grunts I generously interpreted as "yeah sure" slid from his mouth; Ted had Julian cornered by the bookcases, pontificating on some rare volume of ours, the sudden appearance of his money wife playing dress-up was a childish intrusion. Ted is an ass, but I wonder if Gwyneth isn't worse, putting up with his overbearing, insensitive behavior, she in fact *allows* him to be that way. Why doesn't she show some backbone?

Ted. Like some modern day Ford Maddox Ford, right down to the left, the facial hair, the uncut temper, he has a certain quasi-omnipotent *presence*. In fact, Ford Maddox Ford *is* his favorite literary hero, which doesn't surprise me; don't we all choose our favorite authors from those who mirror most closely our own feelings? My own favorite being Jean Rhys leaves me feeling a little uneasy. I hope we're not obligated to have an affair. Will I be moving in with him and Gwyneth after Julian is sent to jail for selling stolen art on the black market? But Anais Nin is a close second for my affection, and she would never put up with the likes of Ford Maddox Ford, I'm sure. She had more gumption, more self-respect, and better taste in men than Jean Rhys. If I must draw parallels, I'd say that Jean Rhys is the old me, Anais the new. I'll stay close, very close, to my own Hugo, my own Henry Miller, of which Julian is the *perfect* combination.

§ Sunday, October 12, 2003. Those *bloody* Blue Angels. I *loathe* Fleet Week. Don't get me wrong, I've no problem with guys walking 'round in sailor suits, it's rather retro (especially in our neighborhood), but I can't stand the constant din of jets overhead. I imagine that every pet

§ **Wednesday, October 8, 2003.** Kenneth has written, to ask if we'd like to organize Paul Reed's books and papers, his archives, for the San Francisco Public Library's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Archival Collections, and build his website. We've gleefully accepted. This is *exactly* the kind of work I'd hoped that I'd be doing when I first started with my library science studies. We're to meet next Thursday to discuss the details. Paul had an *enormous* library, all of which must be sorted – Kenneth and Philippe do not have the room to keep all these books. Some will be donated to San Francisco Public Library, others should be kept, others can be sold to Acorn Books. Julian is an expert evaluator, so he'll be of invaluable help deciding what should be sold, donated, or kept. Paul's papers and correspondence (including a long correspondence with May Sarton.) must be organized, cataloged, and archived. And then his website must be built. There is so much to do.

§ **Friday, October 10, 2003.** We met Ted and Gwyneth at the Grand Café for dinner last night. Julian and I were looking forward to our date with some trepidation. While I find Ted and his wife to be amusing enough, Ted bothers Julian, makes him uneasy, though I can't figure out exactly why. Ted and Gwyneth are somewhat older than we, and I think that Ted likes to take a sort of Fatherly role with us. And while this doesn't bother *me* in the least, I sense that Julian gets annoyed. Ted, instead of engaging in conversation, that is, an equal exchange of ideas, lectures; he tells us what we *should* do, and *assumes* what is best for us, what would make us happy; which is in complete contradiction to our own beliefs. He's convinced, for example, that our move to the mid-west would be *disastrous*, that we would in no way be happy there. He tells us that we should move to, say, Salt Lake City, that we'd be much happier there – we *loathe* Salt Lake City. Doesn't he *know* that unless you are Mormon, Utah is no man's land? That it's impossible?

Part of the problem is that Ted and Gwyneth are rich. They are out of touch with the work-a-day struggle and abysmal living conditions in marginal inner city neighborhoods. And while I'm sure that they mean well, their blithe advice to "buy a little cottage on the Peninsula" isn't taken well, since we know that a "little cottage on the Peninsula" would cost well over a million dollars. There is no understanding on their part of what our *reality* is, though we try and try to explain; I don't think that Ted really listens to what *we* have to say. Like an oblivious parent, he only wants us to see *his* side of any issue. What we have to say goes in one ear and out the other. I smile and nod, but Julian's not able to shrug it off so easily. I wonder if women are able to disregard this typically male behaviour more easily than men, simply because we're forced to adapt to it from day one. We just smile and nod and look pretty, meanwhile doing what we damn well please. Men on the other hand are socialized to make a point, to make their point known, to convince others that their point is *the* only point. And when their *point* is dismissed with a wave of the hand, there is much dismay.

And then, Ted always insists on paying which irritates Julian. As a gentleman and an adult, he wished to pay his fair share, and not be treated as a child or a poor relative. As Ted chooses to eat in expensive restaurants, orders fois gras and \$100 bottle(s) of wine, I'm perfectly at ease with his patronage. We've invited them over for dinner *chez nous* November 1, so I've assured Julian that we can "pay them back" in our own fashion, though I feel sure that Ted will find my cuisine to be inedible. Now *there* is something that I *do* find to be off-putting about Ted – his picky tastes. His toast is "too toasted", his meat is "too tough", the wine "too audacious." I hadn't wanted to have them to dinner for this very reason, and of course, I'm terrified that they'll hate my cooking. Though I feel sure that I cook well enough, it *is* home cooking after all; I'm no chef. If they don't

§ **Wednesday, October 1, 2003.** This, the last day in my office. I spent it packing my books, my pictures, my "personal effects" which Arthur insisted would not be moved by the company. "Any personal effects will *not* be moved. All personal effects must be taken home before the move and be brought back by the employee after October 4."

Karen Holbean and I spent a fair amount of time this morning worrying, no *panicking*, about how we'll get to work come Monday, tracing bus routes, calculating mileage. Karen has been riding her bike while I've been walking a short distance from the train station. Now, we don't know what we'll do, exactly; as our new, completely bloody barfy chrome and glass office building is five miles away, on the other side of the freeway, in an enormous, faceless "office park", intended to be less faceless with its hideous "public art" sculptures and lame fountains resembling piddling upside-down hoses.

Yeah, there's plenty of crap sculpture, stupid fountains, parking lots, and monstrous buildings resembling mirrored Rubix Cubes, but are there buses? Bike lanes? Sidewalks? No on all accounts. One wonders how one gets to work if one doesn't drive. True, there *is* a dubious shuttle which runs from the train station to the "office park", but it runs infrequently (a.m. and p.m. only), and the route is sketchy and unreliable.

And have I mentioned that there are *no* places to eat within a mile? Nor are there shops of any kind (even a gas station). In short, there is nowhere to go at lunchtime – we are banished to office park hell. Once I've arrived on my dubious a.m. shuttle, I'll be trapped in my cube until it comes 'round again (hopefully) in the p.m. Sounds just swell, don't it?

The commute is one thorn in my side, but I've a larger which I fear may be the festering, slow death of me – I'm one cubicle away from the "lunch room", the "lunch room" being a open space crammed with tables and chairs, microwaves, refrigerators, vending machines, all the usual lunch room crap, surrounded by cubicles, *my* department's cubicles as it turns out (this wasn't just a random decision you realize.) How am I supposed to work under these conditions, I'd like to know? I'll be smelling reheated leftovers all day, and forced to listen to non-stop "water cooler" conversations punctuated by the shrill laughter of Buffy. I comfort myself knowing that Leon will now be on the *other* side of the office; no more booming, inane telephone conversations from down the hall about golf dates and Buena Park. Karen and I commiserated, feeling slightly mollified when we saw that we can wave to one another from where we sit. Things could *always* be worse; thankfully Jeffrey and Bill are out of eye-shot. How I wish they were out of ear-shot as well.

Leon Wong, Mr. "Golf Dates and Buena Park", appeared at my office door after lunch with someone's digital camera,

"Hey! Ready for 'the last day in your office' picture?"

Oh Christ, I thought to myself. I suppose "the management" plans on putting these pictures up on some snariny bulletin board after we've moved so we can all feel like one big corporate robot family. I turned away and put my arms over my face,

"No, I don't want my picture taken." Well, it was obvious by my body language, but Leon isn't the brightest bulb on the Christmas tree, after all.

"Aww, come on. Don't you want your picture taken?"

"No, I *DON'T* want my picture taken."

"Oh. That will make a *good* picture.", Leon said sarcastically.

“WILL YOU GET OUT OF MY OFFICE? I DON'T WANT MY PICTURE TAKEN! GET OUT! GET OUT! GET OUT!”

Silence. Silence. But I waited until I heard him in Jeffrey's office down the hall before I got up, half way expecting him to still be standing there, mouth open, drool drooling, to “surprise” me as I put my head up. I shut my door. I can't believe I'll be working in cubicles with these *people* five days from now.

§ Thursday, October 2, 2003. Stanley has come up with an idea for a new television show, “What's Worse?” My “lunch room” story, coupled with his own work place banalities were his inspiration.

Julian met me at the University after work so we could arrive together at Kenneth and Philippe's place South of Market. They've always lived in really fabulous places (Kenneth has won and lost several fortunes since I've known him), and are now considering buying a nearby loft. The loft, it seems, was inhabited by an Anglophile. The walls were covered with framed squares of white watered silk surrounded by butter-yellow walls, the fixtures “Home Depot brass”, while an oak spiral staircase in one corner led to the “loft”. All in all, it was a horror to behold. The building, a late '90s-era “industrial” styled loft, with hot pink common hallways and sheetmetal siding, provided a tragic backdrop to this Anglophile's fancy, the “ceng” if you will, on the cake. But Kenneth and Philippe are experts at seeing past other people's decorating “don'ts”, experts at turning one sow's ear after another into a silk purse.

Our evening, which was planned as “popcorn and a movie”, happily devolved into a gab-fest. I feel that we all have so much in common, I, especially with Kenneth, who has a dark side beneath his *very* successful exterior. Happily, Kenneth seems more relaxed that I can ever remember, more centered, I think, which gives me some relief as I had always felt that he pushed himself much to hard, never taking time to enjoy the fruits of his labor. It was worrisome to me, a staunch believer-inner of rest cures.

Philippe surprised us by showing us his own on-line journal. I had no idea that he was writing. Julian then divulged our own humble offerings, which distressed me not a little. I'm mortified to show them to anyone we actually know, *and* write about – it's so much easier to write anonymously, and I do so fear that I'll unintentionally cause someone hurt or consternation. I suppose this is one of the pitfalls of writing, autobiographical writing that is.

All I can think of is Monday. I'm deeply worried about the changes in my life, the new office location, what it will mean, how it will effect my mental state which is already so precarious, so recalcant. How I hate it that my private office existence has come to an end.

§ Sunday, October 5, 2003. I'm at the University. Sundays are so creepy as I'm the only one here. I put paper over the glass panels in the door so that no one may see me without my knowledge. When I go to the ladies room, I expect to find a bloodied body, “posed” for my enjoyment, like Marcel Duchamp's *étant Donné*s. One light flickers and buzzes as in a David Lynch film. And someone has pulled down the shade in the next room, so I'm no longer able to see my patch of sky and bit of tree. Saturday next Julian will begin coming with me, how much more cheerful it will be with him here.

Following our evening at Kenneth and Philippe's, I was filled with thoughts of their troubles, which are many. It fills me with so much sadness, Kenneth's sickness, the slow demise of his many friends, his alter which holds bits and pieces of these broken lives. I am *so* sensitive. I seem to absorb what others are feeling; I've no imperviousness, and so it takes me several days, sometimes more, to *recover* from visits with my friends, to regain my sense of self, to shove aside all thoughts of others, so that my own feelings and thoughts may crowd in once again and comfort me.

I've been reading Anais Nin's early diary, *Journal of a Wife*, which I adore. To those who would condemn Anais as juvenile, I laugh, I scoff, I roll my eyes at your inability to find sustenance from her thoughts. I find so *much* in her that I acutely feel, that I identify with *very* strongly. I find so much of myself in her; we are both kept from being “happy” and “whole” people – like me, she struggled between her desire to socialize with others, to be “normal”, and her anti-social nature brought about by her *sensitively*. She feels the same horror of life, the ugly truths of people, of human nature. She was a romantic, not a decadent, and so am I. Reading Anais, I am comforted to know that the faults I punish myself for, are the same of Anais, someone whom I admire as a writer, as a woman, so perhaps then, they are not so terrible.

How odd to learn that Anais and Hugo, on a vacation to the Loire Valley, stayed not five miles from where we living in January. We saw le chateau de Vernueil where they boarded, now a school, one day, driving by. We stopped and walked about, compelled, by something, by her lingering spirit, perhaps. But Anais's favorite chateau was Montreuxor, as it is mine. She was as strongly seduced by it as was I, finding it to be the most romantic, the most poetic chateau of all. I must go back, someday, and will.

§ Monday, October 6, 2003. My first day at the new Poffice. I've complained about it recently, so I won't go into it *yet again*. I spent the day unpacking my things, arranging my cubicle as best I could, trying to make it as “homey” as is possible to do. I was distressed to find that no matter how I manipulated my computer, it was still possible to clearly see my screen from outside my cube – this is *not* good. Any journal writing, or general goofing off will be cut to a bare minimum, especially as the “hallway” out side my cube is a major thoroughfare, one in which Mr. Parent uses to get to his own cubicle going back and forth to the lunchroom, the men's room (whose door slams), the copy room.

As I predicted, the lunch time odors and conversations are clearly heard and smelt from my cubicle. Round about 12:30 I fled out of doors where I was pleased to find some old-growth Poplar trees – I *adore* Poplars, and as it was a windy day, the leaves were making the most pleasant sounds. I walked a little way along a path to a place where I could sit upon an old log, where our horrid office building was nearly obscured by my beloved trees, for a rest. Perhaps there is something to like about the hellish new location after all.

Julian assures me that I'm “sitting on a gold mine”, that there will be plenty to write about, that there will be inevitable flare-ups and drama in this new environment, but I'm not so sure. I'm oddly disappointed in our new cubicle arrangement – there wasn't much conversation to overhear, and what I could discern was work related, and not worth repeating under any circumstances. While it's true enough that Butfy is just as shrill and loud as I'd predicted, everyone else is behaving themselves, which doesn't make for interesting reading. It seems I'll have to look elsewhere for workplace complaints. At least for now.

and then, I didn't want it. I've been thinking about Jamie a lot lately, today in fact, and wondering if we were to see each other again, or if he'd given my neurotic, super-sensitive character up for good. So it was serendipitous and a relief when I saw his email, subject line "Greetings".

Jamie keeps many friends around the world. He is energized by their company, but may not see any one friend more than twice a year. I miss the days when we worked together at The office. We'd often sneak out early from work, get coffee, shop, and laugh, *a lot*. Now, I'm lucky if I do see him twice a year. The office is so dull (Jeffrey Cool) and lifeless (Duke Winthrop) without him.

Salmon, peas, and baked potatoes for dinner.

§ **April 2.** We saw *Femmes, femmes* last night on *Caméra sans visa*, a French film program on TV5. *Femmes, femmes*, a French cult film, unavailable on video or DVD, rarely seen, tells the story of two washed-up actresses living their dreams of glory in a Montparnasse apartment filled with photos of 30s female film stars. It quite reminded me of *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*. *Thank god* for TV5 and *Caméra sans visa*. This month, I'll be enjoying the cycle *Jacques Demy et Agnès Varda*, which oddly doesn't begin until April 12. Next week, I have to suffer through *Jules et Jim*, which I find to be (I know, I know, the horrors, the horrors, I'm such a philistine) overrated. Come to think of it, I don't care for many of Truffaut's films, and to tell the truth, I don't know that I'd like any of them at all, if it weren't for Jean-Pierre Léaud, who can turn any screenplay drivel into solid gold cinema history.

Other weeknights, TV5 screens made-for-TV French films, which I find pretty entertaining. Happily, they're subtitled, so it's no problem for my less than *parfait* listening comprehension. And while one might expect them to be bad, as are made-for-TV films in the United States (though they, in fact, have their charms as well, in an ironic way, of course), they aren't without merit. First, it helps me to practice my listening comprehension while watching; second, it gives a view into French life one might not see in lofty "art" films (though one must take it all with a grain of salt – it *is* still film, after all); third, I'm absorbing French "pop" culture and becoming familiar with washed up French actors and actresses (France's answer to Tracey Gold, Melissa Gilbert, & Shannen Doherty), and finally, the plot-lines *are* better.

I'm also hooked on *On a tout essayé*, admittedly a little lower brow than *Caméra sans visa*, but entertaining all the same, because it's *foreign* you see. I hold the same sort of fascination for Mexico's *Shado Gigante*, though this is nothing compared to France's *Le Bigli*, hosted by a manic guy in suspenders, and several cartoon characters, one of which looks like Jabba the Hutt. Contestants vie for modest prizes, playing seemingly dangerous, silly stunts involving chainsaws, go-carts, and paint balls, *sans* helmets or eye protection. As I sit, mesmerized and horrified, I ponder the mystery of a people who are capable of *this*, and *Céline et Julie vont en bateau*.

Hummus, pumpernickel bread, and grapefruit juice for breakfast.

§ **April 3.** I've had facials, body scrubs, pedicures and manicures. And each time I go to a spa, I think to myself, I'm never coming back. But then, inevitably, I forget, I read about glamorous spa treatments in *Vogue* or in *Allure*, and I think to myself, "Yes indeed! I ought to go to the spa too, for a nice relaxing and decadent day!", so I make an appointment, and I go, and I find fault with just about everything, and with everything else, I feel either uncomfortable, or duped.

writes as I would like to. I believe in him utterly. He exercises his talents now; later, will come something that should delight us all.

James, with a Master's in creative writing, is a professional writer with a modicum of success. He still struggles with his novel, but while I but moan about mine intermittently having yet to begin, he is consumed by his; it is his *raison d'être* and he works hard. He makes progress. Tonight he is coming to dinner. We will share our writing, discuss it, analyze it, try to help one another. I dread his polite glossing-overs, his refusal to criticize my work, for, like him, I see no reason to criticize the truly hopeless. Of what use is it? There is only hurt without the possibility of help.

Finally, there is Andrew, of whom we're all in awe, our most successful friend. Andrew has published many short stories, and is now almost finished with his novel. Not a casual journal writer he (though he keeps one), but the real thing: a real artist who is willing to give up his creature comforts so that he may devote all his time to observing, distilling, writing, working, and it shows in his work. I am amazed at what he's done.

But why all this bellyaching? What of my own happiness? My own satisfaction? Why should I need validation from Mother? From my friends? Why must I compare myself with and seek praise from these people, all more talented than I, so unable to give me what I need: worshipful recognition? Why not be the worst? The least "successful"? And live without accolades and compliments? Shouldn't the aim of *any of this* be my own entertainment? And isn't it true (I remind myself), that I do *all this* because I *need* to do it? There is a constant running narration of my life, its settings and characters in my head which will be there always, no matter what I do. There has always been a book in my head, running like a constant third person narration. This morning: "She stepped onto the hated shuttle, dreading the glare of the morning sun through the ridiculous "picture" windows. The man with the hairy hands and his crossword, the stout Mormon recounting her weekend. Another foul morning, as would be every morning that week, as would be every week as far as she could see."

§ **Monday, November 10, 2003.** Her voice sounded as if it had come from the end of a long cardboard tube. And it was early; and so it wasn't yet infused by that desperate yet monotonal drone it would have later, following many meaningless speeches and contextless status reports. I had helped myself to tea, following a false start with coffee. The tea, I had thought, might provide a bit of the atmospheric far awaysness one needs so desperately at such insistent functions.

Marian Snitt disguised an early morning sign-in attendance sheet as a roster for an end of day raffle. "Do you have a problem with signing things?" she asked, after some disdainful comment slipped from my mouth. (How I hate the office's tendency of dangling some two-bit prize or another in front of us, though we've long outgrown lent-cake crowns and Christmas stocking clemintines. Their mistaken assumption that we should be gleeful and enthusiastic to participate, that we should bow and scrape and congratulate *the Management* for their thoughtful generosity – gifts of left over convention freebies for the grasping, needy office employees, "Thank you! Thank you!") Later, she would grasp the podium and read her speech, which had clearly, painstakingly, been worked upon all weekend, rewritten and practiced before her sad little beagle, Riggs. Riggs yawned and closed his eyes, making that sad, little, tired beagle sound as he did, prompting Marian to take a little liberty with her language, carefully rubbing out her plain ol' English using an ancient Pink Pearl, with what she considered to be ten dollar words and phrases, "cognizant", "a fit of

idiotcy", which she believed would lend her presentation more weight, more credibility.

There were tables, large oval tables, covered by tablecloths, white tablecloths which had no doubt seen many receptions, many sales conferences, many functions as dull, dull, dull as this one promised to be. At the back of the room lay the stuff of enticement, lures of the lowest common denominator: glazed donuts, cinnamon raisin bagels, coffee and tea, all set out in a depressing array of the most stultifying, Tuesday morning pre-sales seminar, Holiday Inn fashion. Missing only, were the cheap gabardine suits, the cologne, the contrite and shamefaced men clutching their cell phones, cooing to the battle-axe back home in Munich, the morning after a late evening of out-of-town "festivities" at Miss Mamie's down the road a piece.

Marian Smith stood at the podium, clutched and staring, with her dried up voice and her dried up personality, motherly in the most perfunctory, domineering way, a perfectly perfect institution matron if I ever saw one, a battle-axe from Munich. Marian, *cognizant* of her role as mistress of ceremonies, invited questions, then tersely avoided answering them, refused to answer them, belittling her audience all the while - one of her "fits of idiotcy". I dare say. She later had the nerve to query us, two hours into our white tableclothed oval conference table sit-in, if we wouldn't care to continue through the break with the next three speakers, ... since we're running a little behind schedule." Someone, I couldn't see whom, sitting at the front of the room, perhaps it was Binky Harrington (she has a little clout), emphatically shook her head no. We were given our break, our paltry twenty minutes of "freedom", to wander the immediate surroundings, the yard and the terrace, to get our exercise and refill our tea cups, to discourage blood clotting in the leg, and to use the euphemism.

Eleanor took the opportunity to corner me on the terrace, to talk at me about France, about her next trip, how "unbelievable" it all is, the "excitement of it all", interspersing her monologue with her horribly mangled French phrases and place names. Much to my dismay, but I'm not surprised, she's found my writing at B——.

"Lucie. *Bonjour. Como sau vou?* I see you're writing professionally."

"Well, yes, *sort of*, but please, *please* don't tell anyone."

"But why on Earth not? This is a well respected outfit, isn't it? B——? Isn't it highly thought of?"

"I don't know, just don't tell anyone. Okay? You see, I like to keep my life, um, compartmentalized. Do you understand?"

"Well, of course, if you don't *want* me to, I won't, but I don't know why."

She thinks I'm weird, I know, but if she understood the possible ramifications of this, well, I *knew* I never should have linked the two, this journal, and my "professional" writing (such as it is) - this can only lead to tears. Why do I flirt with disaster so? I certainly don't want my office-mates to find out about this little, er, experiment in literature, and now that Eleanor could potentially find it she'd well understand my hesitancy. But since Eleanor is loathe to follow up on anything I've ever done creatively, I perhaps worry unnecessarily.

I turned away from this disagreeable situation to find myself faced with überboss Russell Gold. One must make small talk with the head of the company, mustn't one? I began with the obvious, a nearby museum I was interested in dashing to at lunch. "Have you been?", I ventured. "Why yes, we had one of our Christmas parties there one year, *blah, blah, blah*." The conversation quickly turned to golf clubs and water fowl, talk of local museums isn't very interesting discourse

§ **March 30.** Julian and I have been heartily inspired by the Brothers Quay, whose films are little miracles, dark urban settings, life seen through dirty windows. Through them, I've discovered the somber composer Lech Janakowski, and am further intrigued by the diaries of Franz Kafka, who has undoubtedly influenced the Brothers - I wouldn't be the first to call their films Kafkaesque.

I've brought home Dodie Smith's *I Capture the Castle* home from the library. The book begins,

I write this sitting in the kitchen sink. That is, my feet are in it; the rest of me is on the draining-board, which I have puddled with our dog's blanket and the tea-cosy. I can't say that I am really comfortable, and there is a depressing smell of carbolic soap, but this is the only part of the kitchen where there is any daylight left. And I have found that sitting in a place where you have never sat before can be inspiring - I wrote my very best poem while sitting on the hen-house. Though even that isn't a very good poem. I have decided my poetry is so bad that I mustn't write any more of it.

I can see that this is going to be very good read. Thank god for inspirational books, and that I still find them.

Potato-leek soup and cannaloupe for dinner.

§ **April 1.** Julian and I spend several hours today doing our taxes. We're only getting \$400 back, but as Julian so wisely pointed out, it is better than owing \$400. Still, I had been counting on a large refund to help finance a trip to France this year. Since this was not forthcoming, we will have to save the old fashioned way, drat and alas.

I've made appointments at Re-Fresh for a pedicure, facial, and massage. This will be my first massage, and instead of looking forward to it, as I should be, I'm a little nervous - I'll be naked and vulnerable in the presence of a stranger, albeit a professional stranger who looks at prone, naked people all day, but this still does nothing to alleviate my discomfort. Ironically, or not, I've requested a male masseuse. I feel more comfortable with the idea of a man touching, and viewing my naked body, *c'est normal, n'est pas?* Women can be so critical, competitive, and nasty when it comes to physical attributes, their lack of, or in all their bountiful glory, so I don't want to ruin my massage wondering how a female masseuse is sizing me up. In my opinion, men are much more forgiving of physical flaws, or indeed, what they can't perceive as negative at all. That I think of these things at all, does this make me repressed? Do I have "issues"? Is it me? Am I projecting my own character flaws and psychoses? Or is it merely pandemic female body insecurity, business as usual?

Tomorrow evening we've plans to dine at Bistro E Europe with Chimes. Since we've never actually eaten there (only peeped in at the door), I feel both excited and apprehensive. Excited, because if all goes well, it should be a memorable evening; apprehensive, because Bistro E Europe could be, potentially, crowded, loud, and boisterous. I shall try my best to be in jovial, convivial spirits tomorrow evening, but as our dinner follows my massage, I expect I'll either be seriously disturbed, or distressingly relaxed. At least my face and feet will be in fine form.

Janie emailed me today, wondering what's what. I've not heard from him in over a month, since telling him I wasn't taking the job at University. I felt so terrible after I'd made my decision, guilty, he'd helped me with my presentation and been a much needed shoulder to cry on as I agonized over my interview. I felt like such an ingrate, he'd helped me enormously to get this job,

own. Once in awhile I'd venture a game of hopscotch or jump rope, when peer pressure seemed imminent. Still, terrified, I'd be forced into group games by bitch grade school teachers who noted my antisocial tendencies with disapproving faces. Picked last, dreading what was inevitably to come, I'd cower, and avert my face, while my classmates pointed and laughed.

I've never been athletic, and I've always known I'm sub par when it comes to strength and coordination. Other children are born daredevils. We've all a sense of what we can, and cannot do. I couldn't, and I knew it, yet my butch physical education teachers would shriek at me, on the playing field, on the asphalt of the basketball court, while the other kids whispered and smirked, "You can do it, if you just try!"

Oddly, I had a talent for ballet. I'm weirdly flexible, long and thin, graceful – I get it. Like Carrie, I took my "revenge" in college gymnasiums where square-shouldered jockettes were sent to "gain some flexibility and grace." These wholesome faced princesses, ice skaters, gymnasts, and synchronized swimmers, made a mockery of ballet, and I could sense their frustration, anger, and confusion. Having been lauded and hailed as physical geniuses since they could walk, they were now made to look ridiculous as I led them through postures they could never perfect, their bodies as rebellious and uncooperative as mind had been when playing at team sports. In their eyes, I was their better, and it bothered them – they could not compete. And with my heavy makeup, magenta hair, and dancer's garb, I was also a freak, infuriating them even more.

Friday nights, outside the gymnasium, they were once more in control at night clubs and house parties, mini-skirted, blond hair lacquered into place, a plastic cup of courage in hand, their gaze slid over me suspiciously, green-eyed, resentful, as I cut through the mob to the dance floor.

At some time, I realized that the joke was on them, and not just because they couldn't surpass me in the ballet studio, that it was *them*, and not me, who was defective. I realized that "the fringes", as my Mother kindly called us (She was, and still is, one of *them*). She keeps her sorority pins in a little velvet box in her scarf and glove drawer, prized talismans, totems of her past), were the *charmed* ones, not them. We were smarter, more creative; we had inner lives, whereas they were consumed by competition and comparison. These kids, who taunted me for being different, for rejecting the pack mentality, grew up to make money, lots of money, by fitting in, and "playing ball". To drive a flashy sports car, to marry an alpha spouse, to hang out at sports bars, ostensibly, to "network", and "bond" with the others. To amass "toys", to "win" the biggest paycheck, to succeed at the "game of life". It's all so juvenile. They've been well indoctrinated.

Meanwhile, my "loser" friends and I shun everything these sheeple hold dear: the McMansion, the conventional marriage, the 2.5 kids, the SUV, the "stylish" wardrobe from Ann Taylor, the blond highlights, the implants, the bottled tan, the latest best-seller, Hollywood blockbuster, or restaurant *de jour*. But are we really happier with our "weird" style, subtitled films, "obscure" books, and "pretentious" ways? Or do we only imagine ourselves so – psychological delusions, a reparation of sorts for the indignities of our pasts? And yet, I'm free to do exactly as I wish, and while they would say the same thing (this is America, after all), I can't help but wonder, because these people inevitably depend upon each other for cultural and lifestyle clues, they all purposefully mimic one another; they wouldn't dare deviate from their social milieu fearing ridicule, or worse, being ostracized. Old schoolyard habits die hard. See them now, in their identical uniforms of ball caps, khaki shorts, polo shirts, and athletic shoes, scanning *USA Today*, shooting the breeze, slurping their lattes at Starbucks.

Homemade cheese and green chili enchiladas for dinner.

I suppose. I left, without bidding farewell to Eleanor, or to Russell, engrossed both, in impressing one another with tales of ill-fated sporting expeditions.

We were called back to our burdensome tormentise. We filed in, lemmings to the sea.

There was a time when I would have gone along with it all. I'd have put on a good face, a shining, eager face, not that I was actually *eager* or *good* or *shining*, but I at least *seemed* that way, and appearances are everything, as they say. But I'm sick now of playing this stupid game. Some people never tire of it, I guess that they enjoy it, that they relish it. They play it well, and they "win", with their houses in gated communities, their leased Jaguars, their children in private schools. They feel important, substantial, purposeful. There is nothing else for them to get up for in the morning. What does one do, if not work? If not to focus on one's career? Isn't this what life is about? Is this not what one's purpose is?

There is much tragedy in the world, *n'est-ce pas*? It is all so depressing, but why should I be surprised? Why is it so marvelous to me that these *people*, these automatons are so passionate about this work, which to me is so dry and so lifeless, as to fill me with dread and loathing? Someone *must* do it, I suppose, and then, most people find *the arts*, what is my passion, to be so much dedicated dross from devils long dead, and in their opinion best forgotten.

Buffy, today, for once was quiet. I rather felt some concern for her. Had her dog died that morning? Had she discovered a passionate letter in her husband's pocket from the *ingénue* he'd been tutoring every Thursday evening this term? A shy, almost inaudible hello this morning, that in fact was not meant for me, but for Jeffrey Cool, had set my mind to wandering, a late morning's entertainment, a spinning of tales. I see her now, lost in thought, staring at a patch of white tablecloth in front of her, worrying a tasteful, conservative pearl stud at her ear, one she'd bought some years ago at a neighbor's Avon party.

The morning dragged on. The donuts were gone. The bagels were gone. People were sneaking off to the bathroom, tiptoeing to the coffee urn. While *the Management*, Russell and Marian, looked around the room to see who was and who wasn't paying attention, the rest of us stared blankly at each presentation, or fidgeted with personal supplies we'd brought to get us through the day: Eleanor's knitting, Tory's romance novel, my yellow legal pad and *Bic* medium point.

I felt sick, and somewhere close by a baby cried the squalling, red-faced screams of an angry infant. Outside, a blustery day, a golf course, and the kind of people I can't even look in the face, determined to play through, no matter what the weather. A voice droned on about databases, files, format requirements, and deadlines. There was a couch near, in the next room. I could see it, but it was of no comfort, it will be of no comfort.

I am required to stay in my banquet seating, a monstrously uncomfortable chair with too high a back, no arms, and low pitch to the rear. I am not happy; and I don't want to participate, I don't want to be a team player, and I don't want to be a good sport. The tea was bad, leaving me nauseated, and I can see that lunch will be dreadful – they've begun to unload bags of chips, cans of soda pop, and crap sandwiches in clear plastic boxes onto the buffet tables behind us from kitchen trolleys. The bait which drew us, a free lunch, is nothing but faux comfort – this is no free lunch. This is not our promised "catered" lunch, but a "box" lunch. With visions of a hot meal on a cold and cloudy Autumn day, we're instead victims of a bait and switch plot care of The Plant. I've half a mind to eat at *Knuckles*, the sporting bar next door, at my own expense, in protest, but at what price dignity? *Knuckles*? Instead, I'll visit the local museum, of which Russell, Mr. Gold, has no use.

§ **Sunday, November 16, 2003.** I'm at the University for the afternoon. I can see out the window in the next room, through a locked glass door – rather like Alice in Wonderland. If I could only find the little glass key...

It seems that it's been one of those days where I've done nothing but write and spill forth. I knew it would be that way last night. I couldn't sleep, and my mind was filled with racing images, strange colours, and words, words, words. It was so very odd. I kept thinking, if I told all this to a psychiatrist, I wonder if he'd think, "Hmmm, classic symptoms of [insert mental affliction here] syndrome. Ms Ogilve-Graves, we are going to put you on a daily course of 20ccs of thiorazine, but first, we'll need to hospitalize you for observation. Now, if you'd just put this jacket on, and follow these nice gentlemen."

I've already sent off three letters this morning, I'm catching up on my correspondence – I'm regretfully always so far behind. In one, to a Mr. Sebastian Tooey, a grandfatherly guy, a genuinely nice person, I divulged too much about my family, my Mother and Father primarily, who are both too inscrutable to believe, but did I need to go on as I did? Was it right of me to complain so, to a kind man who merely wanted to congratulate me on such fine writing? I dare say, he may no longer be such an adoring fan. I hope I am mistaken.

Mother and Father, how I both hate and love them. Seems normal enough; doesn't everyone feel this way? I guess that Mother, especially, has been on my mind because we are to drive down to see her this coming weekend – the dreaded Thanksgiving visit. Mother is not a "bad" person, not really; she's just reactionary, judgmental, and has always withheld her love from me, used it as a weapon. An important member of the DAR, all she particularly cares for is playing bridge or reading conservative newspapers – not much else. To her, I'm quite the bohemian, and she does not agree with me that this is a good thing. She's quite given up on me, I'm sure, I never joined the young republicans, nor married a guy like Richard Nixon – my brother turned out exactly like Richard Nixon, so she's at least happy for one of us.

Ah yes, my brother, the adorable little dickens, how do I count the ways? There are so many, you see. He's an accountant, a right-wing conservative (he makes Rush Limbaugh look like Wavy Gravy), ridiculously old-fashioned, a *dangerously* old-fashioned young fuddy-duddy – he makes Mother seem positively like a pretty confection with cream filling. How I pity the Infanta, his little daughter Colette. And his wife, Maria – the woman belongs in the home raising a passel of brats, deterring to the man on all matters of importance (that would be everything, by the way.)

We are like oil and water, my brother and I. Me, the poetic one, of artistic temperament, garbed in dramatic clothes, lots of black of course, an interesting book under my arm, proclaiming the beauty of the "autumnal imagery" from some film, or poem, or something, as he rolls his eyes all the while. Still taking every opportunity to poke malicious fun at me – some things never change, do they? My brother, ever the fraternity brother with no imagination, fishing every weekend on his pat's boat, always a beer or tumbler of scotch in one hand. The *Chronicles Magazine* in the other. Lazy, smug, his way is the only way, condemning to hell anyone who doesn't agree with him 100 percent. Sure that he will be made "partner" one of these days, so he can send his kids to private schools, and buy that sport's car he's always had his eye on. And since he is on the fast track to being one of the "haves", he's no time for the "have-nots" – this would include me, and anyone else who isn't wholly concerned with being an upstanding, hard-working, no-nonsense American citizen.

Ah yes, my brother, who will no doubt make the following comment while at table Sunday

must, to fit in, to make friends, to *blend* in. And had I known all of this before I chose my shoes, I don't know that it would have mattered. Always defiant. Always, mapologically, *me*.

§ **March 27.** After a late lunch of lentils and chicken apple sausages, I set off for Whole Foods with Julian, my market basket over my arm. On our way we stopped into Aunt Bill's for a quick peek. I immediately spotted Sharon Cool, looking bored, browsing. "Egadi! It's Sharon Cool!" I said, in a too loud voice, hoping I'd irritate her. It did. She spun around, with that deer-in-the-headlights look turning to feigned happy surprise when she realized who'd made such a fuss.

Jeffrey and Sharon, it seemed, had taken my advice by dropping in at Aunt Bill's, having expressed some interest in new furniture our evening at Foley's. "Go to Aunt Bill's!" I had said, and now, here they were, Jeffrey, looking bland and washed out as always, in a narrow brimmed straw hat, blending perfectly with his straw-coloured face and straw-coloured hair. Wearing faded khaki pants and t-shirt, he could have disappeared into the African savannah, had we instead been shopping in Johannesburg. Jeffrey, who keeps emergency earthquake supplies in his desk, is ready for any contingency, fire, flood, lions on Polk street.

I chatted amiably enough with Sharon for a couple of minutes. She pointed out a nightstand, "It's the right size, but doesn't go with our other furniture." I nodded and tried to look serious, thinking of their poky apartment of sad little possessions. Julian had disappeared into the back room. Jeffrey, meanwhile, was hovering near the front door. "Well, er, um, we gotta get going..." he started. "Don't let us keep you." I interrupted, irritably.

What's with them anyway? What did he think was going to happen? Did he think we were going to Shanghai their afternoon? Force them to have some fun for once? Is it so difficult to be civil, even if you don't like someone, in public? Are we so bloody awful? ... Or are we scary? I've never seen such a blatant need to skedaddle.

§ **March 28 - The Secret Order of Things.** A sunny day, and I accompanied Julian to S— Library and a picnic in the park, our Sunday routine. We sit on a bench near the playground, and watch the toddlers. And their parents, who either micromanage, or completely ignore their kids.

Today, we observed the micromanagement variety, working scrupulously at rearing her issue, "Britana, *I need you* to use the ladder. *Thank you*, Britana, *I need you* to go down the slide feet first. *I don't want you* to scrape your teeth and hurt your face. *Can you* put your feet first *for me?* *I need you* to put your feet first. *I need you* to *put your feet first*, Britana. *Thank you*. *Good job*, good girl! *Whewee!*"

Now I know where these most irritating people come from, and why they've turned out this way. Of course, if I had a kid, and I don't, thank you very much, it would probably die, or be horribly disfigured, because I'm one of those people who believe in learning by experience. And aren't children born with an innate fear of injury? I certainly was.

Yes, I was one of those little girls who didn't want to injure themselves on the monkey bars, playing ball, or climbing steep hills. While my colleagues were gleefully knocking their teeth out, garnering concussions, and dislocating their shoulders, I was building volcanoes in the sand pile, inspecting the bushes for ladybugs, or making daisy chains, all the while in a world of my

and I wonder if many artists don't "suffer" from this same malady? Isn't the goal of many artists, visual and otherwise, to create a more perfect, a more bearable world? And yet, I think of artists I've loved whose primary aim is to expose truth at all cost, beauty be damned – their art is about suffering, about hatred, about the absurdity of the human condition, not about the elevation of daily life to the sublime. I adore and appreciate both, but find myself carefully creating my own world, all the same, a cocoon, a padded cell where I can hide from the banality and grotesqueness of the quotidian. With every item I buy, be it mouth care (Marvis), or music (today, it was Fletcher Henderson), I am sure to put distance between myself and the world, and between myself and others I suspect. At work I keep an antique teacup for my tea, I've lined my cubicle with framed, black and white photographs of Paris and 1920s travel posters, a retro radio sits to the left of my computer, and plants, most notably, a large rubber tree, accent the whole, keeping inquiring eyes out of my space. At home, we've carefully assembled an apartment of French antiques, heavy fabrics, Frankincense, deep sofas, books, candle-light, vintage alabaster lamps, Aubusson pillows, Provençal quilts, rare perfumes, deco light fixtures, wool rugs from the Caucasus, rusted urns, art nouveau vases, wrought iron plant stands, an arsenal of CDs and DVDs for inspiration, damask curtains from Paris, embroidered cotton sheers from India, branches, and the paintings and photographs of artist friends. It's taken years, to build our world, to edit, to refine, and now here we are, ensconced.

There was a rock band I once liked, now less so, though they've been a terrific inspiration of sorts, The Cramps. Their inspiration comes not from their music, nor their image, but the way they've fashioned their own world. I read, in *The Wild World of The Cramps* by Ian Johnston, that they created a world for themselves when they realized they didn't fit into the world as it was. Their Hollywood cottage, filled with artifacts and objects which gives them happiness, is a backdrop for their own realized versions of themselves, beautiful monsters. Julian and I feel the same way, and in our own manner have created a world for ourselves. And when we do venture into the world, it is not to the Waldmarts of the world to shop, nor the Cineplex for the latest Hollywood drivel, nor the local playground filled with brats, but to shops and boutiques which add ambience and "event" to the experience, to the decaying art deco theatre for an independent double feature in the foggy recesses of the Outer Richmond, or the ossuary filled with decaying statuary in the hills of Oakland, so that each moment can be lived to its fullest. I dress as I like, though eccentric, though remarkable, because it makes me feel like *me*. I wear my hat, black and wide-brimmed, I carry my tapestry bag, shaped as those of our great-grandmothers, I wear my theatrical earrings from a tiny Parisian antique shop in the *Quartier Latin*, my shoes pointed, long, dainty, deadly, my lips berry stained and glossed, feeling well-dressed, contented, of my own invention. And I think of my friends, as unique and as eccentric as I, though styled by their own imagination – rather than aping one another we provide inspiration and drive one another to create anew, anon.

Mother used to say to me, "Lucie, you just want people to look at you!", which is far from the truth, I do not, and feel decidedly uncomfortable when noticed. Is it my fault if my instincts, if my style, if how I view myself is so different from the pack? I do not do this consciously, though at time is may seem so, and even to me. Am I putting distance between myself and others? Or am I following my own proclivity? Or is it a little of both? Is my fear of being swallowed by the crowd what has made me what I am today? What I always was? I think of myself in 5th grade, wearing oxblood, t-strapped wing-tips (pointy toed of course), while the other girls wore Vans tennis shoes. I was hopelessly out of it as far as they were concerned, a freak, a weirdo. But I had only chose the shoes which appealed most to me; I didn't follow their example; it never occurred to me that I

evening (he always does), "Hey Lucie, why do you always have to wear black? You always wear black. Are you in the *occult* or something?" followed by much smirking on his part, and much teeth-gritting on mine. Mother thinks his comments just hysterical, of course. I've heard that he's already told her to prepare my most hated meal, something she calls "Piquat", which he's assured her is my favorite. It's all so childish, and dreadful, isn't it? And I have to go, and make polite conversation, and try to act the sophisticated San Francisco adult, no matter how difficult it might be, among these bloody buggery barbarians: my family.

After this delightful visit, what is sure to be a hellish debacle, but grist for the mill, we'll drive to hated, horrid Las Vegas to see Julian's mother and step-father – a welcome relief. They are nothing but kind, generous, and easygoing, and like a cool cloth on an aching forehead in a dark room – just what one needs following such an emotional ordeal. How I wish though, that they had not moved to Las Vegas, which in my opinion, is the worst place one could live in the United States. Even worse than Florida, I should think.

I've just hung up the phone, having talked with Carmella for the last hour. Carmella. Though I love her, I'm disappointed in her motives, which she's just now confessed. Having decided that she's failed as a visual artist, she's turned to writing – she intends to "make it" as a writer, to make money at it, that is. *This* is her goal. When she's so bloody talented. It's ridiculous. She has not *failed* as a visual artist. She painted beautifully; I loved her work. She *was* a success, but it's true, she never made it commercially, and though it's misguided, I think this has soured her artistic impulse.

And why shouldn't it? Look at Thomas Kinkade. Isn't he proof enough that monetary success and talent are almost always mutually exclusive? It is discouraging for anyone who wishes to make a living from the arts, but doesn't she know that it's not important that one makes money? That great art rarely is commercially successful? It is *only* the process, damn it, that is important – this is what *should* be the reward, and if it's not then **there is no point**. To paint, or write, to do *anything* with an eye for profit is futile; even if one *does* enjoy the process at first, it will soon enough be a chore and a burden. Does she need to learn this lesson yet again? With her writing? If so, her work will not come from the heart, from the buried places within. Instead, it will emanate from poisoned little voices whispering, dictating to her what is salable, what is popular. Her work will not be honest, nor be good, nor be her, and she may well consider herself a failure, once again.

We talked about writing and motivation, and why do it at all, and it's kind of depressing for me, these discussions with her. And since she wants to make money, she patronizes people who are, as she describes them, "important", not because she necessarily enjoys their company, but rather, because she feels that these connexions, these "important" people's clout, may help her to be published. She goes from writing workshop to writing workshop, populated by "serious" writers, led by local pop writing gurus. She's tried to get me to go as well, but I will not, though I have considered it. But I do not want to become self-conscious about my writing, with other writers', stylistically different writers' opinions echoing about in my mind as I set any word to paper, their agendas and notions thrust upon me, petrifying all that I produce. And since most of them are not doing what I do, writing as I write, I feel it is particularly dangerous for *me* to venture into the world of post-modern literature, to pay court to its doyens and devotees.

And these workshop attendees, for the most part, seem to be frustrated souls. They've dutifully attended creative writing programs, *studied* under the tutelage of some two-bit fiction writing pygmalion, earned their MFAs. They can walk the walk, and talk the talk, but they have no tal-

ent, not really. Sure, they're competent, but they've the cookie-cutter feel of identical product, churned out of a factory where everyone reads exactly the same – the same tricks are used, everyone's a derivative of one another, and if there ever was any talent, it was washed away like so much irregular detritus, cowed out with belittlement and fear by their mentors.

We had dinner last night with the Cools. We met them at an Irish pub of their choosing, down near Fisherman's Wharf. It was a dive, a drinking establishment primarily, the food an afterthought. The place was filled with loud, rough men; seedy, neither picturesque nor cozy – not one bit. I'm fed up with letting the Cools lead me round by the nose, to these crudely bars and "restaurants". Out of kindness, I always let them choose our meeting places, and their plebeian, communist tendencies have ruined my evening for the last time. Should we dine together again, they *will* go to Foley's, an Irish pub of the most perfectly atmospheric strain, oil paintings of Irish heroes (Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, Beckett), high coffered ceilings, a Victorian bar, handsome Irish bartenders in ties and white aprons, wood floors, a mood all round of tweedy, just in from the moors warmth – a hearty dish of Irish stew and a pint of Guinness, all while listening to the Uilleann pipers.

§ 16 March. There is a vase of white and pink lilies across the room, the indirect light reflecting from the white-washed buildings of the city drifts through organdy sheers. It's been warm, I've the fan blowing softly; Tunisian music plays.

It's 5:20, and I'm peckish, so I've prepared myself a small meal of hummus and apple. Quite by accident, I've arranged a very Arabic afternoon, though I don't know that apples grow in Tunisia.

It's been a long several months; first unbelievably stressful, then, a recovery, a refining, a purging of whatever it was which had been festering and growing within. I'd talked myself into something which was not a good idea, but I had to brush closely past the reality of this idea before I could give up the ridiculous fantasy; a relocation to the Midwest, a university job, George and Martha without the drama. On returning from my visit, from my interview, I was a wreck. I was finally forced to face the real possibility of this foreign life, not the sepiatinted dreams. And when I decided that no, I did not want to do *this*, it was a blissful release. The corporeality would have been dreadful, changing jobs is a crapshoot. One has no idea who, really, they will be working with. Would they all be freaks? Or, would they regard me as a freak? I'm from California after all, and I *do* have strange tastes and habits. Armed with my library of Dedalus "lifestyle" books (*The Decadent Cookbook*, *Gardener, Traveler*), would they view me as some kind of antipodal Martha Stewart? Creepy on the outside, wholesome within?

The months following my interview have been spent in a stupor of sorts, resting, recovering from the stress of it all, starting blankly at TV5 while sipping from endless bottles of Gerolsteiner (which Carmela oddly calls "Jew water".) The preparation, the trip, the plane ride, it was all so much torture, two months of torture, two months of my life spent doing not what I want, not thinking of what I want, never reading what I wanted, but instead, in a constant state of panic; reading the *literature* (if one could call it that), preparing a corpse of a presentation, writing a 30 page paper, buying "interview" clothes, worrying that I wouldn't get the job, worrying more that I would. And now, at last, it's over. And I'm so relieved, and so blithe, and so gratified to be here, back in San Francisco, in California. I need only think of the Parisians I met whose eye's lit up when I said I was from San Francisco, "*San Francisco? Mais, j'aime San Francisco!*"

The money I'd save for the ostensible move has been spent, a catharsis I suppose, an antique

to see their new house, my brother makes a pile, but illness has kept me away. I've half an idea to spend Christmas with them this year; if we survive, there will be *beaucoup de grist* for the mill.

Julian nags me about writing a novel. He says that my family, my mother and brother, are ideal material, that if I don't use them for a novel, he will. I agree, of course, but find it difficult to write about my own family. Not because it's taboo, or I'm afraid what they would think (my mother has given me her blessing and laughs manically whenever I bring it up), but because I've moved too far beyond my feelings for them – they just don't inspire me anymore. Had I taken this on ten years ago, it might have worked, but now, it just seems a chore.

Josh was born long after me, eight years in fact. Before he came along, to ruin everything, Mother and I spent summers at the beach, evenings at the symphony, weekends at the museum, at the library, or visiting her fancy friends in Beverly Hills. Following her divorce from my dad, *the musician*, she dated professional guys in suits, doctors, lawyers, who'd bring me presents, some of whom I really liked, and they liked me, making me laugh, and that's the way to my heart. Predictably, she married the one guy I didn't like, my brother's father, a sullen, introverted engineer, who refused to let me call him Dad, who spent his days lying on our aubergine velvet couch in his underwear. It was repulsive, he was repellant. My brother, unfortunately, takes after him.

Following my brother's birth we moved to Laguna Beach, leaving David to a bachelor apartment in Westwood. Much later, we heard that he'd been committed – schizophrenia. Though my brother never let on that it bothered him, I wonder, still, if it did, if it does. He too could lose his mind, though I've heard mental illness skips a generation. *Pauvre Collette*, and now Sébastien. Will they one day show up on my doorstep with bloody knives?

Apples, carrots, and hummus for dinner.

§ March 26. The fog has returned, and with it, cooler weather. While I want it to be cool, I must admit I hate the constant grey, a sky of grey, where shadow and light are smudged; an oyster-coloured world, rather like Paris, but without the drama of Beaux-Arts architecture. I find myself wondering if I am one of those S.A.D. people, whose mental state is dependent on light and weather. I should hate to be one of them, but I am, in fact, influenced profoundly by the weather. My favorite weather is that of the first winter's storm, as it arrives, the wind changing and growing in strength. Swirls of autumn leaves, the scent of lightning approaching, quite like the weather as it is in the black and white portion of *The Wizard of Oz*, ominous, portentous of something dangerous and beautiful. But the fog keeps us cool, protects us, gives the air its oceanic feel.

I've an internet friend in Illinois, Albertine, whom I like very much. It's a pity that we aren't physically closer; her interests mimic mine, mine hers. She's mysterious, esoteric, passionate to learn, to live, while keeping her sanity in the workaday world. She mentioned to me a book she is reading about the "Highly Sensitive Person", that it describes us, Albertine, Julian, and me to a T:

"We are sensitive to odor, sounds, lights...daily life is overwhelming because we are able to absorb so much at once therefore creating sensory overload. HSP's choose solitude over socialization, intimate intellectual conversation rather than crowded events."

It does indeed sound like us. I'm terribly interested in reading more about this "syndrome",

"You don't have to visit!" Julian said. "Why, if my dad had his way, we'd be flying to Buffalo every year. You don't *have* to go."

On that, our evening ended. Sharon asked which way we were going. I asked her which way they were going. "That way," she pointed up Powell. "We want to, er, watch the Cable Cars." "We're off to Walgreens." I gestured up O'Farrell. Relieved, we went our separate ways.

Brunch with Carmella Sunday morning was a welcome relief. With Carmella, one can have a normal conversation – we spoke of films (*I Capture the Castle*, *The Secret Garden*), Carmella's writing, painting, and her old friends. Carmella is *never* a bore. Telling her of my evening with the Cools she proclaimed, "Lucie, I'm never going to socialize with *them!*" Though I tried to convince her to spend the day with me, she was off to her writer's workshop at 1:30, and I, I explored Noe Valley (which I found to be unremarkable and full of ethnic import shops, though I did buy a cunning pair of earrings from a Russian shop girl at a dicey dress shop at Noe & Sanchez), walked over the hill through the Castro, then down Market street and through the Tenderloin home. A long, arduous walk, followed by a hot, rosemary scented, candle-lit bath, Fauré playing softly.

Julian brought home an intriguing book from the library, *The Early Sunset Magazine, 1898-1928*, selections from Sunset Magazine's first 30 years. In particular, I am interested in an article written in 1918 about the Temple of the Wings, which I will read this evening. I've also started *Infinite Variety, the Life and Legend of the Marchesa Casati* by Scot D. Ryersonson & Michael Orlando Yaccarino. I look forward to it with *relish*.

Pasta with sun dried tomato pesto and chicken, and cantaloupe for dinner

§ 22 March. I awoke this morning with allergy symptoms, decided to call in sick, and went back to bed. Julian left for work several hours later. I've just now arose. It's 11:00. The Claritin I bought at Walgreens following our fateful night with the Cools is still in my tapestry handbag; they recommended it, by the way. I'll have some following my tea. Normally, I don't take any medications, I'm suspicious, and find that the side effects of most are equal to, if not surpassant of the actual ailment. I've also had a problem with admitting that I'm one who gets allergies. Allergies are for sissies, for sickly kids with inhalers, for people who aren't at one with nature. I forget what a city girl I am, what a girly-girl, I, who never camp, mountain bike, or jog, rather read prone on the divan, or walk shady streets for an hour or two now and then. I am frail, and pale, a delicate flower.

I've a new nephew, born yesterday morning, Sebastián. I hope he grows up to be a wild bohemian, a hard living painter, a Gauguin, a Pollock. His sister's 2nd birthday is Saturday. I've sent Colette a beautifully wrapped present, wooden blocks resembling a barn, farm animals, fences and trees. I hope she'll like it, though don't expect her to grow up to be a farmer. Instead, I think, a *dansreuse*, my own deflected career superimposed upon her. She'll be stronger, less prone to injury, her mother descendant from sturdy Mexican peasant stock.

It's weird having a niece and nephew I've never met. Someday they will meet their Tante Lucie and Uncle Julian; I hope they find us intriguing, romantic, handsome, just the opposite of their dorkus parents, my brother Josh and his wife Maria. What a couple. It will be miraculous if the family stays in tact, if these children grow up to be intelligent and creative. Josh, the accountant, lives to fish, to drive his SUV to the mountains to kill trout and drink beer with his fraternity brothers. Maria occupies herself with her cell phone and family gossip while shopping the mall, absent minded pushing Colette in her stroller. A typical American family I should say. I'm dying

French walnut beds (Louis XV) and mattresses, a new bedside table of brass lion's feet and white marble, a flat screen monitor, books, candles, perfume, evenings out, summer clothes, a Martine Goron teapot, and finally, an Etruscan ring. I'm so decadent when I've money, so completely, so utterly reckless, so now I'm back we're I'd started, broke, but happy, contented, lucky in life and in love.

§ 18 March. TV5 is on. I'm listening, and glancing over now and then, to a program about the working poor in Switzerland. One woman, a 42 year old divorced mother of three, says she never eats at lunchtime. Her flat, in a rambling old house, ca. 1890, is grand, but sparse. She looks tired. She rides a pretty silver bicycle to work where she scrubs down restaurant gear. Another woman writes out her monthly expenses:

800 sf loger (rent)
400 sf nourriture (food)
300 sf essence (gas)
200 sf téléphone
300 sf Visa (credit card)
200 sf réserve (savings)

One Swiss franc is equal to 80 American cents. Oddly, these "working poor" of Switzerland, are doing better than many here. I think they have socialized medicine as well? And the natural beauty of the country counts for something, doesn't it? It's difficult for me to feel sorry for them.

I've made plans to have brunch with Carmella and Guy Sunday morning at Miss Millie's. I love that Carmella takes me places I've never been, shows me things I've never known, introduces me to new music, art, and literature. She's more like me than anyone I know; our childhoods are very similar, the things we did, the events in our lives, our rotten families, though admittedly Carmella has had a much more glamorous life than I. I adore her; she's my inspiration. Guy is gentle, crazy, handsome, broken, wise; her childhood sweetheart. I love my friends. Julian, unfortunately, will not be joining us. He'll be at the library in S—. I will miss him, aching to recount a pleasant day with *mes amies charmants*.

There's an old white house on a corner in S— which has inspired me to write some fiction, finally, soon. I need a quiet morning, alone.

Breakfasted on sheep's milk yogurt & bran flakes, German bread toasted with goat cheese and tomato pesto, a sliced pear tossed with lemon juice, and a pot of Mariage Frères *Thé des poètes solitaires* from my new teapot.

§ 19 March. Julian has observed that "they" save the terrible sounds for early morning, so as to wake us from a hoped for morning abed. Today, it was a leaf blower; yesterday, a cement truck. I awoke feeling vaguely sick. I suppose that the pollen has finally gotten to me too. We'd had plans to walk at the Presidio today, lungeoning in a shady grove, somewhere along the way. Instead, laundry and lungeoning; we both feel lazy and out-of-sorts today. It is so terribly difficult to do anything when I feel this way. Creativity is out of the question.

Later, IFC is showing a documentary on Guy Maddin, one of our favorite directors. His films, influenced by the silent era, are dark and quirky, like nothing else. He's a new film to be shown

at the San Francisco Film Festival, *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*, but it's doubtful that we'll go to the screening as we're both adverse to swarms, of anything. I guess, then, the Dracula Theme Park will be out of the question. Can you imagine hordes of pushing and shoving Slavs, "blood" flavoured ice-lollies in hand, queuing up for a "horror ride"?

Roast chicken and cantaloupe for dinner.

§ 22 March. Saturday night with the Cools was terrible. When will I learn? When will I learn that it's impossible to socialize with "normal" people. But then, are the Cools so very normal? I hate that I'm always dismissing the Cools as stupid and boring, in fact, that is probably why I've made more of an effort with Jeffrey, riding the train with him, arranging little dinner dates, chatting amiably at work, but it's guilt and nothing else, or perhaps faith in humanity, that everyone has a kernel of exotica within.

We arrived at Foley's to find Jeffrey and Sharon already there, waiting for us, pints in hand, looking grateful, relieved that we'd shown up, already, I felt annoyed. Why are they always so prompt, early in fact? It's so typical of Jeffrey, so conscientious, so *mindful*, so irritating. How I'd love it if for once they showed up half hour late, laughing over some joke, or absurd incident which had happened on their way, blithe, mirthful. How nice to see evidence that they actually enjoy themselves, that they *live* a little.

We were seated. I asked our Irish waitress how to pronounce the name "Diammid". Jeffrey showed a little interested, but when I explained to them that I found it while reading a book about Caroline Blackwood, her life with Lucien Freud and Robert Lowell, they both gave me blank looks. Dead end. Jeffrey and Sharon are culturally illiterate. Worse, they've no interest in rectifying the situation. I asked them what they had done that day.

"We had a draper to the house to give us an estimate."

"A draper! How exciting!"

"It's going to be *very* expensive." Sharon said, looking extremely pained.

"Well, if it's really *so* expensive, why not go to Pottery Barn, or Target? Why not put up sheets from Goodwill?" I said, somewhat piqued that they found the process of decorating to be painful rather than pleasant, but hoping they'd have the sense of humor to see the absurdity of it all: their dramatics, my flippancy. Mutely, they stared.

Julian told them about our evening at the Russian restaurant several weeks ago. Jeffrey brightened up.

"We ate at a Russian place once, on Geary. Now, it's a kosher French place."

"Kosher French?" I asked, confused.

"*Actually*, it makes a lot of sense." Jeffrey had taken the condescending tone he gets when he thinks he knows more about something than me, and would deign give me a lesson.

"Oh? Why?"

"Because the Jews are all being run out of France. They're being *persecuted*."

Julian and I sat, irritated, not knowing what to say, sipping our Guinness. What *does* one say to this sort of allegation? *Yeah, those Jews sure are persecuted everywhere they go. Or, Why those terrible anti-semitic French! It's the Vichy government all over again. Or, It must be those rotten Arabs!*

We ordered, we ate. I tried to get the conversation going with "Who would you cast to play yourself in the story of your life?" Silence. Bewildered looks as if to say, "Can you believe this stupid question?" The conversation inevitably turned to politics, religion having already reared it's devil-horned head. Normally, with these two, I just smile and nod, ask questions, go above and beyond what is socially expected when it comes to listening to tiresome political harangues. But already provoked, and well on my way to furious, I thought, okay, what the hell, if they want to start in with the politics, okay – this time, I speak my mind. Fine with me, I thought, I never, ever want to see these boorish dullards again.

I won't bore you with the gory details, but suffice it to say I ended up ranting about Walmart Corporation and Starbucks, how they're taking over the world, systematically putting mom and pop pharmacies and coffee shops out of business everywhere; Walmart Super Centers, decimating human-scaled, town centre "ecosystems" all over the country, soon to infest the world like some sort of Capitalistic plague.

"But these businesses give new life to depressed areas. They bring business and foot traffic, and isn't it the consumer's choice after all? No one is forcing them to patronize these businesses. If the others go out of business, it's just economics. Why do you think customers *choose* to go to Starbucks and Walgreens?"

"Because they're stupid. Because they want what's familiar. Because they want to save money. It's all about money." Sharon's mouth, which had looked quite like that of a trout, clamped shut. I could sense that Jeffrey and Sharon were horrified that I'd called the American public "stupid". "I suppose that's Capitalism." I continued, stridently, "and it's the American way, but I hate Capitalism, and I guess I'm pretty un-American. In my opinion, these companies aren't good for the community at large, or our country."

Jeffrey and Sharon Cool are cheapshates. Jeffrey and Sharon Cool just want to scripp and save. Jeffrey and Sharon Cool have cowbells in their wallets, motifs fly out when they open them. Jeffrey and Sharon Cool don't know how to live. Jeffrey and Sharon Cool will always buy the cheapest option, shop generic, seek out sales and bargains, and patronize places like Walmart Super Centers because it's convenient, and they know they can buy their meagre daily requirements cheaper there than anywhere else. Damn the traffic, damn the gargantuan parking lot filled with repellant SUVs dingged full of baby seats and Golden Retrievers, damn the hot-pollon pushing and shoving through the store with their super-sized shopping carts filled with ramen (10 for a dollar), and hair spray, and Beyoncé CDs, and crap clothes manufactured by Indonesian children for 40 cents a day.

Jeffrey left for the bathroom. I confronted Sharon, "You look like you want to leave really badly."

"Yeah, I do, I mean, it's difficult for me to sit for more than a couple of hours."

"Then I guess a trip to Europe is out of the question."

Sharon shifted about in her "hot seat", "Well, Jeffrey wants me to go, so I guess I'll have to someday."

"He really *does* wants to go, you know. You really should have a real vacation for once. You two never go on vacation. Jeffrey needs a vacation. All you ever do is visit your geriatric parents. Why don't you live your own lives instead of being held hostage by your parent's guilt."

"But you don't *understand!* We *have* to visit. It's not that easy."

§ **June 6, 2004.** Julian and I have been occupying ourselves with the “Addams Family” marathon on TVLand this weekend. How I adore the “Addams Family”, if not always the series writing. I suppose this will sound kooky, but we’ve so much in common with this fictional family, creating our own reality, a horror of middle-class suburban aesthetics, a penchant for the arcane and bizarre, a love of language (Gomez: “We *love* linguistics and philology.”), and a sadness for the loss of good breeding (Gomez: “And I thought good breeding was a thing of the past.”). Our apartment is filled with oddities, the wax mannequin arms, the cicada exoskeletons under glass, the dead branches adorned with 19th-century iron keys, the 18th-century French doll heads. Not your normal decor, or is it?

I have finished my first work of fiction, and am very proud of myself between brief periods of self-doubt. Is it good, I wonder? With all the work I have spent on this, and the projects I plan for the future, I will have less time to devote to my diary, but this is perhaps a better use of my time.

§ **June 7, 2004.** I’ve just hung up the telephone. My friendship with Carnella seems to be back on track, though the first hour of our conversation was a little too tense, too forced. I stayed calm and disinterested in myself, turning the conversation to her, to her problems, to her projects. This is what she likes, to talk about herself, and that’s fine, because I honestly hate to talk about myself, though it wouldn’t seem so, considering this journal. But a journal is all-together different. I’m not being prodded or mined for information. I express what I wish, when I wish, and it is mostly introspective, quite the opposite of the litany of B.S. that passes for most people’s conversation. In fact, I wonder why it is that people, in general, prefer to talk about absolutely nothing, rather than *stay* silent?

Take my shuttle ride today for example. The train schedule had changed, and so there were many more people on the shuttle than there normally are. All around me, people were stating, and restating the obvious,

“Will you look at all the people on this shuttle?”

“They’re going to have to get a bigger shuttle.”

“Or furnish another shuttle.”

“Yes. They’ll need to get a bigger shuttle.”

“Or get another shuttle.”

“Well, I don’t know where these people getting on now are going to sit. Are they going to have to stand?”

“I guess so. I guess they’ll have to stand.”

I just stared out the window. Is this what’s called chit-chat? I can think of other terminology that isn’t as polite, yet extremely suitable. Talk like this just make me tired. Several years ago I went on a driving vacation with Mother, alone, and was subjected to the same sort of one-sided conversation throughout. I just shut down after the first afternoon, exhausted. She probably thought me petulant and sullen (she’s always thought me petulant and sullen, come to think of it), while I considered her chirpy, chatty, good natured attitude to be annoying, but ultimately normal, and so I could not fault her. I could only fault myself with endeavoring to engage in a long-term road trip with this type of company. In theory, I’d love to be a humky-dory, good-time

Yesterday, after I’d changed into my “luxurious spa robe and slippers”, was a “knee to toe pedicure”. All went well until Ho-chum began to “massage” my legs and feet – truly, it was the most excruciatingly awful experience of my life. She wore rubber surgical gloves, and rubbed my legs so vigorously as to raise red welts – the friction of the surgical gloves being terrific. Much to her surprise, I asked her to remove her rubber gloves (apparently, most people adore this sort of torture), but it was still agonizing, the damage having been done. I chose a Capri blue toenail polish which predictably looked much better in the bottle than it did on my toes. *And* it was frosted, and I hate frosted polish (and lipstick for that matter) – so tacky; what was I thinking? I must have been delirious from pain.

Following my loathsome pedicure, I waited in an Asian minimalist waiting room, a style I detest – Anna Sui said it best when she said, “Minimalism is for people who have no imagination”, and I couldn’t agree more. Unfortunately, this “style” is extremely popular in San Francisco; one finds it everywhere. I suppose its fashionableness may be explained in part by its affordability; how much can river stones, wicker furniture, raw silk pillows, and a couple of moth-eaten orchids cost? And with the polished concrete floors, halogen track lighting, and rice paper screens, one has, basically, a cold and uncomfortable environment in which to mentally prepare for distressing spa “treatments” – Perfect for leaving one feeling exposed and defenseless.

Snezana, my Bosnian facialist dourly led me to my next “treatment”, an 80-minute custom facial, which I really, really needed. I appreciated Snezana’s old world, no nonsense approach, but her theories sounded a little odd to me. “You have cat? Cat causes redness in skin.” After giving me instructions to wash my bed linens, bedroom walls, and carpets repeatedly, not to “sleep with cat”, or “put face on cat”, I explained to her that I live in a studio. “You love cat?”, she asked? “Well, yes,” I said, “of course.” “Then you have redness in face forever.” I could tell she was horrified that I’d live with a cat, rather than forgo a little pink in my cheeks, which really, is nothing at all. If she knew that I sleep with Mr. Darcy under the covers, and put my face into Mr. Darcy and Miss Moppett’s fur several hundred times a day, she’d no doubt die of shock. But despite ye olde worlde mumbo jumbo, the facial was very good, and I was pleased with the results, though I will say the facials at Jeffrey Thé are superior, if ridiculously expensive.

It was then time for my massage. I’d worked myself up to this experience the entire afternoon; I was prepared, I thought. But when Josh came to retrieve me from the Zen anteroom, my heart sank, for Josh was not my expected jolly and gay Christopher Reeve clone, rather, he was a decidedly serious looking heterosexual male who looked as if he could have been an ex-member of Hootie and the Blowfish. I think he looked a little shocked as well, but I tried my best to look casual, like I always request seriously heterosexual hootie-like strangers to massage me. Hootie led me to a darkened room, and asked me if there was anything he should know, “Like what?” I asked. “Like any physical problems.” “Well, my hips hurt me sometimes, and my feet are always killing me.”

Hootie did his best to relax me, and I think I did rather well under the circumstances, but I just couldn’t get past the fact that I was naked (albeit under a sheet), and this Hootie *dude* was rubbing oil all over my body. It was *weird*, and I guess I’ll never do it again. So much for my glamorous spa experience. Why *is* it that *everything* seems better on film or in print?

§ **April 4.** Chimes arrived in time Friday evening for us to take the long way to Bistro E Europe on Mission Boulevard. I was ever so excited, excited to eat Hungarian food, excited to

back in the red gloom of the dining room, excited for the gypsy music to wash over me, and driving through the Mission, I felt ever so appreciative of the the old neon signs, the people milling about, preparing for their own evenings out – a suitable preface to our own evening’s entertainment. Bistro E Europe’s outdoor sign was off, and the heavy red curtains were pulled shut as they’d been the night some weeks back when we’d arrived to find it jammed with reveling goatee’d hipsters and their Juliette Gréco-esque molls. Tonight however, the place was disquietingly empty, save a pair of blond girls with rather prominent noses and weak chins. The restaurant was silent but for the sound of the mustachio’d proprietor who was joking with the blondes; there was no band of gypsies, nor even a fascimile.

Julian strode in purposefully, “Good evening sir! We’ve a reservation for 7:30.”

“Well, tonight, you don’t need a reservation, as you can see.”

“Oh, well, we just thought... Well, the last time we were in, we ...”

“Yes, I remember you. There wasn’t a seat in the house. But tonight, well, tonight is different.”

“Perhaps it is the traffic problems today?” Julian ventured, as the Bay Bridge had been closed since early that morning.

“Yes, and our customers come from the East Bay ...” I thought this an odd thing to say, odd that one’s customers would all come from so far. Why not then, set up shop in the East Bay?

“But will the band be playing later?” I interrupted, for this, this is what I’d primarily come for.

“Yes, I hope so, but they too come from the East Bay.”

We sat at a table in the very back of the room, next to the beaky blondes, while the proprietor put on a CD of Romani music. We ordered wine, we ordered dinner, and we sat back. Dambinis finally arrived and set up their arsenal of instruments.

Chimes, meanwhile had become quarrelsome, describing our apartment as “Spartan”. I asked him what he meant, exactly. I could tell he didn’t expect me to go there, but I did, because I couldn’t tell if he was mocking me, being sarcastic, or simply didn’t know what “Spartan” means. “I just mean, compared to my place, it’s Spartan.”, he finally admitted. His place is much more Spartan than ours; I was still dubious. Chimes yawned and looked at his watch. “Are you having a good time?” I asked. “Do you like this place okay?” “Yes.”, he said, and looked at his watch again. I felt tempted to ask him if there was someplace else he needed to be, but knew it would be rude. Julian attempted to get the conversation going by drawing attention to my Etruscan ring.

“Look at Lucie’s new ring.”

“Oh, that’s nice. Where did you find it?”

“I found it at Neiman Marcus.” I said, giving him an ironic look.

“I shouldn’t think one could find anything this nice at Neiman Marcus.”, he said, looking a little disappointed by my answer.

“Sure. There are plenty of nice things at Neiman Marcus.” What does he know? “It’s Macy’s that’s so bloody dreadful.” I continued.

“If there’s something to be had, you’re going to have it, aren’t you?” he challenged.

I didn’t know what to think. I mean, this sort of comment was so unlike Chimes, so I took it in stride by responding, and laughing that yes, if there *was* something to be had, I *would* have

for myself, and as I treat others exceptionally well, I think, I will demand nothing less from my friends.

§ June 1, 2004. Back to work today after a long weekend. How I adore a long weekend. There aren’t enough of them. I baked Julian a three-layer cake from scratch, vanilla with lemon frosting. I should like to do a lemon cake with lavender frosting, decorated with candied violets. Today I whipped up a batch of meatballs, so there will be spaghetti with meatballs for dinner, with watermelon, I think. For some reason, this seems like such a summertime meal to me.

I never took home economics in school, though I wanted to. Mother always said, “You can learn that at home any time you want. You’ll take electronics and woodshop instead.” And so I did. There was a cheese-grater box, and a sad little plant stand coated with drips of varnish. In electronics, I spent most of my time creating massive pools of solder while one of my besotted classmates completed my strobe light. I later gave it to the child psychologist Mother had enlisted to find out what was wrong with *me*. We stopped attending our separate sessions when it was not so subtly implied that the problem was with Mother, and not with me. “That woman was a crackpot,” Mother later said.

While Julian works on his novel, I have been working on my first short story, a success, I think, for my first try. There is some work which still needs doing – I plan on doing this from the office, tomorrow. With any luck, it will be “published”, *chez* Our Secret Lives, this week. Or should I try and have it published, really published? And in the end, is there a difference?

I’m really quite amazed at the number of films Julian and I watch. More than anyone else I know. It sometimes seems that that is all we do, watch film and discuss it. We’ve both film fanatics. Yesterday, as I lay in the tub, Julian perched nearby with Mr. Darcy in his lap and I related my idea for a screenplay, a scary film where nothing scary is revealed, rather, it is the suggestion of what is there, what is unknown, and the character’s fear, which makes it scary. Julian had ideas as well, and his were just as interesting. I sometimes think we should work together to write something, sell it to Hollywood, and make a million. Our ideas would be stolen however, and we’d see it come to fruition years later, surprised (but not really), indignant, and poor, *comme d’habitude*. I’m so negative when it comes to Hollywood. Too bad we don’t know any film makers. The alternative would be to write mass market paperback blockbusters, à la Stephen King, and have our books optioned by Miramax, or some such crap as that.

I received an ominous letter from Dr. Collins today. I’m to call tomorrow, because whatever it is that is wrong with me “should not be discussed by telephone.” I suppose it’s horrible, whatever it is. I’m trying not to think about it.

§ June 2, 2004. I’ve just hung up with Dr. Collins. I am to have an operation in a month. Though nothing for sure will be known until after the operation, it appears that my condition is benign. I am relieved, for now.

I’ve not heard from Carmella for a week, and wonder if she was as unhappy with our last meeting as was I. I need to send her an email, very neutral in tone, cheerful, nonchalant, for I do not want to give up my friendship with her. She has value for many reasons, and I must remind myself that no one is perfect. What I must do, is to see her less often (I only see her once a month now), and to plan brief, structured activities. Carmella is such a child, in so many ways.

unable to look me in the eye when he does deign to speak to me. I may never know, or will this all blow up in my face someday?

When I think of the things I've written of, the complaints, the incrimination, the nasty attitude, all of it, *I* am lucky. I could have been, perhaps, fired, had the entire thing been read. Or had this tatletail told our überboss, I faint to think of what would have happened. Writing and commerce do not mix. Art and commerce do not mix. And opinions, when contrary to the bright and cheery stupidity of the masses, will only get one into trouble. I can see that my attempts at outrage have worked.

A break from all this is in order, but not for too very long, though if you are reading this now, no doubt, you are a new reader, for I intend to cut all ties, and start afresh.

§ May 12, 2004. I've registered for a painting class at the Institute, "Fundamentals in Oil", or some such thing. I feel only slightly better than indifferent about it. I hope that when it's actually begun, I'll be more enthusiastic. I had painted some years ago, and was quite good at it. As a matter of fact, my first attempt at *nature morte*, was quite impressive, I will say. I obviously have talent, but have not pursued it. There's never been a place to paint, for one thing, and for another, writing and design have taken up all my time. Julian hopes I will be able to paint us something nice. Me, I hope I can unlock some hidden creativity which will help me with my writing.

I've quit trying to get people to look at my writing. Other writers are loathe to comment on it, and the general public doesn't seem to understand what I am trying to do. In the twain are those who comment on it, but who don't take it seriously – it's a journal, after all. Me, I love journals, I love to read them, I find them to be the *most* interesting art form. As for fiction, I prefer first person. And where the two meet, it's the most humanistic of writing, the most poetic, sometimes, the funniest, the saddest. But I need to expand, and I will take this new beginning as an excuse to do so. There will be fiction.

§ May 27, 2004. Julian's gone off to work. It's nearing two o'clock. I'm lonely after a night of bad dreams, Mr. Darcy being run over, Mini come back to life and leading me down a dirt path, Marilyn Manson wanting to date me (what would Julian say? It would be an awkward situation.) I awoke early, headachy from our night out with Carmella and Guy, and guilty following a spending spree at Fluevog. I don't know that Carmella likes her birthday present, it's almost as if she resented it, as though she resents anyone being nice to her. But if I hadn't bought her a gift, I fear she'd be just as unhappy, perhaps more so. Why are holidays such a damned nuisance sometimes? Even my own can be fraught with danger, and I consider myself to be abnormally self-aware. Julian's extravagant gift this year made me feel slightly sad, even bad, like I didn't deserve it. None of this was *his* fault however, only my own insecurity and self-hatred.

Sometimes I wonder if it is, indeed, worth it to socialize, to have friends. And what is a friend, exactly? What does one need from a friend? I should like someone I can trust, first of all, someone who sees the world as I do, for the most part, someone who will be kind, supportive, and truthful, but in the nicest possible way. I don't want friends who are mocking, or competitive, or dismissive. Who push me away, who are unkind and then try to patch things up with desperate apologies. This is not friendship. There is something sick, and needy, about this type of "friendship". Is it dependency? I don't know, but I will not be anyone's punching bag – I have too much respect

it. But the "joke", which I found to be decidedly passive-aggressive, didn't end there. Whenever I asked for anything, for water, for our table-top candle to be lit, or for Julian to fetch me a cushion, he quipped, "If there's something to be had, you're going to have it", and I found myself progressively more annoyed as the evening wore on by his childishness.

The band began to play, and our food came. While Julian and I oohed and ahled over each mouthful (I had the Roma lamb; he, the Chicken Paprikash), and swooned over Daanbini's rendition of traditional Slavic tunes, Chimes mindlessly shoved in mouthfuls of his stew, like someone starved, his head bent over his plate, holding his fork "truck driver style". It was appalling, really, and while I've tried in the past not to hold his disgraceful table manners against him, after being teased and mocked and aggravated all evening, it couldn't help but add fuel to the fire (to use a most hackneyed metaphor.) I wonder if he was able to taste, let alone appreciate his meal, but more shocking, he didn't seem to notice, or appreciate the music. I loved it, as did Julian, so much so, we bought a CD from them that evening. "If there's something to be had, you're going to have it, aren't you?", Chimes said, pointedly looking at me.

After we'd dropped Chimes home, Julian and I had a long talk, about our "friends", about our failures with socializing, and we both decided that we must become more selective, even if it means we're alone, together, always. For, we love each other's company more than anyone else's, we are perfectly content with one another. And if our guests aren't delightful, they detract from our own experience, from our own good time. Unlike most couples, we socialize with others to enhance our relationship, as a mutual amusement, rather than as a means of deflection from each other. And while this may seem callous, life is short, and I see no reason to spent time with people who don't add something positive, who, rather, add to one's discomfort and misery.

§ April 5. I've just had email from Julian that Chimes is in the hospital following an appendectomy. I suppose we should go and see him, regardless of my confessions of yesterday. And of course, his attitude towards me may have been coloured by illness, which I assume he could have been feeling as early as Friday. Poor Chimes. I hope that he is okay, recovering well, and that he has a private room in hospital.

Chicken planks and potato puffs for dinner.

§ April 6. Julian and I have just returned from our visit to Chimes. I'm more convinced than ever that we should never see him again.

Chimes is recuperating at Kaiser, the most heinous hospital that ever was. He shares a room with an old Filipino man, who moans and groans loudly from behind a pink and blue curtain. And while I can't blame the Filipino man, and feel sorry for his state, I couldn't help but feel sorry for Chimes who endured these laments by day, and snores all night.

Julian and Chimes chatted amicably about work, while I sat mentally comparing my own appendectomy hospital stay only last year at St. Francis, with Oliver's. I had a private room with a view, the nurses didn't look like Haitian zombies, surly lackeys weren't poking their heads in every few minutes, I could open the windows to get a little fresh air, there was a comfortable lounge where visitors could rest, and the hallways were carpeted to muffle noise. What a difference. How I hate Kaiser. How I hate that medical care has come to this. How relieved I am that I can still choose my own doctors and my own hospital, that my health and fate are in my own hands.

Chinnes, it seems, notices these indignities, but doesn't seem to care; he has a rather fatalistic view of the entire matter, accepting of any kick in the face he's given. How I loathe this sort of attitude, for while it would seem on the surface that his apathy effects only him, I strongly disagree – people like him reinforce the idea that we can be treated badly, substandardly, because it's a-okay; no one is complaining, after all. If people universally would only kick up a fuss and demand more, we'd get more and be treated well. And so I hate him for his passivity.

Any, Oliver's friend who'd been keeping watch over him these last days in hospital, returned from her lunch. May I just say, she was huge, a face in a sea of corpulence, a massive gumdrop atop a mountain of flesh. I believe she is what is referred to as "monstrously obese". She sat in a chair near Oliver's side, and after introductions, barraged me with personal questions, including, "How old are you?" Well! The nerve! She insisted that we'd met before, so she wanted to know where I "hang out",

"Nowhere I said", feeling annoyed and panicked that I was being cross examined by a coarse and common stranger.

"Well, what *do* you *do* then?"

"I hide at home with my husband and lament the loss of civility." This, went right over her head.

She began digging around in her massive backpack. "Would you like to colour?" I couldn't help but wonder how she would appear with this massive bag strapped to her gargantuan body, what an obstacle she'd in the Metro, for example. "See what I've done?", she asked brightly, grasping prieffrey coloured, crumpled pictures with her chubby fingers.

A pack of Crayola markers, and a sheet of photocopied Celtic knots appeared from her bag, and I dutifully began to colour, but I soon stopped. I wasn't enjoying it in the least; I'm simply not interested in tarring up photocopied Celtic knots with cheerful prieffrey colours. I asked Julian what time it was, trying not to seem too very eager, and said I thought we should be going. We stood up. Any stood up. Any lunged at Julian, still clutching her pink marker, and endeavoured to give him a great, big, bear hug. When Julian recoiled, she said, "Yes hug, no hug?" Julian now had no choice, "Yes hug." I braced myself for the impact. She turned from Julian, grinning like an idiot, and hugged me to her marshmallowy body; *hard*. We left. We fled. I was disgusted. Why had I let her grill me that way? And why should someone we'd just met want to hug us like that? We barely knew her. How I detest false intimacy! More importantly, I couldn't help but remind myself that this rude, disgusting person who *colours*, Chinnes counts as his closest friend. Instead of feeling sorry for Chinnes lying in hospital, instead of forgiving him for his recent boorish behaviour, I instead feel that I detest him more than ever. I never want to see Chinnes again.

§ April 7. This must not be our season for friendships. First, the debacle with Jeffrey and Sharon, then the Chinnes incident, and now Cyril has dropped *us*, comic, because we dropped *him*, some months ago. I can only assume that Cyril had some sort of *emotional* attachment to Julian, otherwise, why would he *bother* to send Julian such a nasty, hateful email?

"... you purported to subscribe to an earlier style of politesse, based on mutual respect. That you actually did not, does not surprise me, but certainly disappoints."

"... none of us is entirely pleasant." For the sake of higher forms of pleasure, one accepts the bad with the good, as I would willingly have done with you."

cowering in my cubicle, listening to someone loudly chewing carrot sticks, mouth *en déshabille*, while someone else shrilly expands over her "dream vacation" in New Zealand from far across the room. Someone else is using the microwave, beep, beep, beep goes the timer. A can of C*** falls from a vending machine, another sensitive soul slams the lunch-room cupboards. Ah! the picturesque sounds of office wildlife. [Note to self: *water rubber tree plant following journal scribbings*]

I've picked up and tossed aside, in the following order, *Significant Others: Creativity & Intimide Partnership*, and *Lives of the Muses*. Despite their come hither titles, they were both wretched, a waste of paper, more so *Significant Others*, because of the politically correct slant and patronizing tone (or should I say, matronizing tone?), droning on and on about the victimization of women in artistic relationships, blah, blah, blah. *Lives of the Muses* was just boring, and who cares about Hester Thrale or Elizabeth Siddal? While Alice Liddell interests me slightly, Yoko Ono and Gala Dalí interest me not at all. And how does Nancy Cunard fit into this? Her photograph graces the cover of the book, but she's nowhere to be found inside. Then again, I know all there is to know about Nancy Cunard, so what's the point when all's said and done. Still! Is this the best Francine Prose could come up with? Please tell me there were more inspiring muses than these lackluster unknowns and control freak harpies. Thank goodness I picked up *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* at the Henry Miller Library last week – how I look forward to some good reading, some serious literature.

Orzo pasta tossed with lima beans, leaks, and left over roast chicken for dinner.

§ May 10. Well, here it's happened. After a particularly good weekend of film, and vintage clothing, and picnics in the park, I came into work this morning to find that Mr. Parent had been looking at my website – I found traces of his visits in the logs. Later that morning, after much worrying and conjecturing, calls to Camella and Julian, he asked me to meet with him

"Is this your webpage?", he asked, showing a piece of paper across the desk with the URL on it, www.FeyreedeCerveau.com. "Yes", I replied. There was no point in lying, and dollars to doughnuts he already knew it was mine. "Someone in our department found it, and sent it on to me, after reading some things in it about another person in our group. I was able to figure out who it is, and what you've written could possibly hurt their feelings if they were ever to see it."

I kept my composure. I did not blush, my pulse did not race. I smiled and said, "Yes, well, I was afraid this could happen some day. I am in a writers group, and I've been writing some fiction, with a bit of reality in it to keep it grounded. I tried my best to change the names, and so forth, to keep this anonymous, and I see I've not succeeded." I went on to tell him about the website I used to write for, how I'd used my real name, how I'd asked them to remove the references to my "fiction" site, after it'd begun, to no avail. He seemed to take it well. I tried to make light of it by asking if he'd enjoyed my writing. He laughed. I asked him if he thought I was a terrible person. He smiled and said, "No, but I think you used bad judgment." How is one to be creative and *not* use bad judgment, especially when using one's own life as the cynosure of one's work? I can see I'll need to be more secretive, change names (again), take out some incriminating paragraphs, buy a new domain name (register under a false name), etc. It's all so tiresome. I knew it would end this way though, and I'm lucky it didn't end worse!

I spent the rest of the morning wondering who could have found me, and rattled on me. Eleanor Reardon? I know she's potentially already linked up with my personal website since she found those online articles signed by the *real me*. Or was it Bill Anderson? He's been acting odd lately,

But one *can't* exactly ad-lib when it comes to birthdays and holidays, these events whose very existence requires planning: the friends, the family, the meals, the gifts. I've never been one who's much for production and artificiality, and yet, one can't just ignore one's birthday, can one? I know that people do, but I don't want to go this particular route. No, I sort of like celebrating my birthday, but no matter what the celebration, I always feel a bit melancholy following its end. Is it the exhaustion of having a good time? Is it my disappointment? In what? What exactly do I expect from such an occasion?

It's difficult to figure myself out. I sometimes think I like looking forward to an event more than the actual event itself, the planning, the fantasizing, the *longing* for the thing itself. I've always been a "grass is greener" sort of girl, in need of a project, a goal, a purpose. It is very difficult to just *be*. Mother once said she felt pity for me because I couldn't be content just to float along, like so much aimless flotsam. But if everyone had felt as she does, I wonder if human beings would have accomplished as much as they have? Wouldn't we still be grunting over raw meat if we were, on the whole, content to maintain the status quo? It seems to me, that my longing and restlessness is a natural human attribute, healthy and intelligent, if not altogether conducive to happiness. Complacency, in comparison, seems so, well, pathetic – for happy idiots.

But I sound so mirthless! Julian's surprise was perfection; I *adore* my new harmonium. It's as beautifully melancholy as I'd hoped. Now, inspired by Niro and Isabelle of *Pola X*, droning on their harmoniums all day, I will make eerie, haunting music. I bought myself a new ring, and we had a raucous dinner at Chez Paulisse with Guy and Carmella. All in all, it was a grand birthday!

§ May 3. Summer has returned. And it's only May. The beginning of May I might add. How wretched we felt last night, tossing, turning, hot, sweaty, itchy, uncomfortable, fitful, and all the while Monty, my little furry hot water bottle, cuddled up next to me. Julian escaped to the floor near the window, dragging his bedclothes behind him. I'd rather be hot, than sleep on the floor. Consequently, I slept not more than two hours last night.

I've been surreptitiously reading the various other online journals. Surreptitiously because I don't know yet if I'm for or against – I'd be loath to admit I like them, even if I did, though I would. On the one hand, these people can be terribly clever and funny. On the other, I find them to be extremely coarse and common, just like much of the rest of the world of popular culture – I know, I know, I'm completely hopeless and out-of-it when it comes to what's *hip* and *happening* in the ~~twentieth~~ twenty-first century, and my pretense at being some sort of cultured, arty brainiac is tried and *passé*. But this is my story, and I'm sticking to it – I intensely dislike lowbrow, vulgar behaviour, and our country's "culture" is just a reflexion of the baseness and stupidity of its citizens. What an anachronism I am, and boy does it cause me to suffer – but only when I'm exposed to the likes of these *blogs*, when I'm reminded how different I am from the rest of the world. How silly of me to be burdened, if only for a second, by thoughts of my singularity, when the alternative would be to mimic *them*, to bring myself *down* to their level! Best to continue to revel in my own world, and edit the gibbering mob from my personal space. What possible good does it do me to explore these other realms of existence? And besides, I feel sure she's the type of girl who would have bullied me mercilessly as a child, rather as did Jane de Vries – I shiver to think of it.

I'm tired. I should take to my bed. It seems that today I can only complain and look on the dark side of things – the glass if half empty, etcetera, etcetera. Alas, I am trapped at my desk,

I suppose it would have been preferable for Julian to have told him, "I don't wish to be friends with you anymore." Clearly, this person doesn't understand that when one doesn't return one's ardor, answer one's emails, or accept one's invitations, it is a clear way of saying, in so many words, "I don't wish to be friends with you anymore." This *is* how it's done, as opposed to *officially* announcing the dissolution of friendship, which can only be awkward, and potentially hurtful.

And what of this "higher forms of pleasure" business? Now, what is *that* supposed to mean? What a thoroughly creepy thing to say, fraught as it is with double entendre. No wonder Julian's unease, and mild distress upon meeting him for periodic luncheons in Berkeley. And why should anyone be expected to "accept the bad with the good", such a subjective and personal decision? In this case, the bad clearly outweighed the good.

I just can't spend time with people like this any longer. Why *do* we cultivate these friendships knowing, somewhere, that it's doomed, that it's not meant to be? Of course, one must get to know someone before one can know that the friendship is pointless, so I suppose that our experiences with the Cools, with Chimes, and with Cyril aren't so peculiar. Still, it's odd that all this should come to a head now, all within several weeks of one another.

It's true, we're more persnickety than most, and have higher expectations of people, of the world, than what is reasonable, but I still can't see us settling for less than what we want, what we want *exactly* – life is too short, as I've said. When I think of people we are *really* friends with, Carmella, Andrew, Jamie, Albertine, Kenneth, I see a very similar view of the world, a common spirit, an understanding of *things*, and an approach to life which is fundamentally identical; we understand one another in a world where it is damned difficult to find kindred spirits; it's not a matter of common interests, rather, a common outlook; we are all romantic (in our way), intelligent, intuitive, highly sensitive, and, most importantly perhaps, injured by life. We feel *comfortable* with these people. With the Cools, with Chimes, and with Cyril, especially Cyril, we never did. And while I don't blame Cyril for feeling hurt, who wouldn't, on being dropped, I do blame him for lashing out at Julian with this detestable and unfair email, who is, though exceedingly picky and sensitive, the most forgiving, the most fair, the most magnanimous, the most polite of people. Julian could perhaps be faulted for keeping this relationship going past its lifespan, but only because he wanted to give Cyril a fair chance – they did have many interests in common.

Sausage & lemon risotto and salad for dinner.

§ April 8. I've just spent several hours in the bath, one of my favorite evening rituals. I fill our old Art Deco tub full of hotish water, add a little scented oil (Miller Harris Fleur Oriental) and a healthy portion bubble bath (Kneipps RoseJeffrey), light candles and incense (Frankincense), and set a bottle of Gerolsteiner nearby. Julian selects music (Dominique A.'s new CD, *Tout sera comme avant*), and brings the liner notes into the bathroom, where he sits and reads them to me while I soak and wallow and relish. The cats follow him in, Mr. Darcy sits in Julian's lap, while Miss Moppett curls up on the bath rug. I feel so content and happy to have my family about me, listening to music, loved, and loving.

I've finally finished *I Capture the Castle*. I've decided that the story itself wasn't anything to crow about, it is pretty well weather-beaten after all, but the atmospherics and the language were top notch, and really, isn't that what's important? Oh, I know that many would argue with me, and even I will admit that I love Zola for the plot (though he's neither lacking in language nor atmospherics), but in general it's the feeling a novel gives me, a mood, a dose of inspiration. Next,

I'll pick up Proust's second volume in the *Remembrance of Things Past* series, *Within a Budding Grove*.

The Brothers Quay's *Institute Benjaminia* DVD has arrived. We'll watch it this evening!
Spinach salad and polenta for dinner.

§ April 12. Anita sits in a cubicle near to mine. She eats her yogurt. When she gets to the bottom of the yogurt cup, she aggressively scrapes the spoon against its sides, determined to get every last morsel. I can picture her in my mind's eye, tongue tip twisted out the side of her mouth, brows pursed, gripping the yogurt cup and her plastic spoon as if her life depended upon it, "[scrape scrape scrape]... must! ...[scrape scrape scrape]... get! ...[scrape scrape scrape]... last! ...[scrape scrape scrape]... bit! ... "

Some new guy's been hired who sits several cubicles from me. He's one of those "fond-talkers". He's always chuckling and shootin' the breeze in the style of a used car salesman. Picture the Jerry Lundegaard character from *Fargo*, and you're not too far off.

I've started a "*joie de vivre*" list. One might be surprised, but despite my dissolute, curmudgeonly ways, despite the never-ending font of negativity, I am quite lively, cheerful, *hubbly* even. I've scads and scads of *joie de vivre*, just waiting to burst forth with a vengeance, just give it a chance! Albertine has sent me her "*joie de vivre*" list, inspiring me to do the same, to sort of remind myself of those things which I love, which make me happy, of rituals I may have forgotten which give me pleasure, of outings I can take, things I can do when life gets me down and seems dull as dirt, as it does from time to time ...

Easter, I awoke feeling out of sorts, nasty, foul tempered, depressed. How I needed that yet unmade *joie de vive* list. Unhappy that the skies were a hoary, flat grey (the fog blowing too high for dramatic effect, alas); annoyed and pouting that it was Easter, my most hated holiday. Such a dull, boring, and thoroughly stupid holiday, but I set my teeth to making the best of it.

As a child, I loved my Easter basket. I gleefully participated in colouring eggs, then hunting them Easter morning in our tropical backyard. Midday, I'd happily gorge myself on a meal of *jambon aux pommes des terres gratinée*, then settle in for an afternoon in front of the T.V., watching such stultifying epics as *King of Kings*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, or *Easter Parade* (all of which, no doubt, contributed to my visceral aversion of Easter, though I enjoyed them at the time.) What I didn't like, what I think explains my Pavlovian repugnance, was the ensuing egg eating, which would last for weeks. Mother, of course, *forced* me to eat them; it was beyond her than anyone should *hate* an egg. And while she didn't exactly shove them down my gullet, it would never-the-less end in streams of tears after a prolonged stand-off, with much threatening, shrieking, and Gestapo-esque intimidation on her side.

"Juice, you *will* eat your potato salad."

"There are eggs in it."

"Honestly! It's all mental. You can't even taste them."

"Why do you put them in then?"

"You're not leaving this table until you finish your potato salad!"

And so it went. And sure enough, after the hard boiled eggs had been eaten, or surreptitiously flushed down the toilet, there'd be scrambled eggs for breakfast. The passing of the Easter season

being described, in so many words, as a scoundrel & imposter. An art "collector", who was more of a plunderer than appreciative connoisseur. Times have changed. He is now lauded; deified, practically. No mention of yellow journalism or political manipulation. No hint that he was anything but a great philanthropist, visionary, and dreamer, if not also a mamma's boy seeking validation from a bunch of vulgar and uncouth Hollywood actors. Pathetic, really. Still, I will give him credit for hiring Julia Morgan, for she is architectural genius personified, who created an exceptional place of beauty. What I'd give to live in the *Casa del Monte*, a finger, at least.

More inspiring to me was the trip South, a stop at a roadside strawberry stand, a visit to the Henry Miller Library, our picnic lunch of brie and pear baguette sandwiches at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, our mincing hike through the thicketed canyons to see surprising cascades of spring water, Julian in his brown dress shoes, me in my silver Italian "walking" slippers. Our soundtrack to the afternoon was a bootleg CD of Pink Floyd, playing live to a concert of none but *les fantômes* at Pompeii – it was ever so *happy de lazze*, Federico Fellini meets Anita Pallenberg. There was no traffic to speak of, the sun was shimmering, it was neither too hot, nor too cool, it was one of those days one knows is perfection, even as it's happening, so rare, so coveted, so evanescent.

The trip home was tiresome. It seemed as if all the Bay Area had come out for kayaking, or whatever it is they do, manically driving oversized SUV's in streaming, blurring convoys. Neon, neoprene clad bicyclists and mountaineers were gathered at each roadside trailhead, fueled by microbiotic breakfast power bars, leather-skinned, sinewy, white teeth like gleaming ivory planks, martyrs all, eyescorers and vulgar reminders of reality. I would have lit a cigarette in defiance, with a flourish of my blue lacquered, pale hands – if I smoked. As it was, I instead grimaced a pale made-up face at them. I don't think they took notice me.

It's always a relief to be home. There are letters waiting to be answered from Father, Albertine, and Jane. Mr. Darcy and little Miss Dinah Moppett seem relieved that we've returned home. We've an evening of Pinot Grigio and Pola X in front of us. The divan is soft.

Fresh peas (from the farm stand), ham, & pasta in a cream sauce for dinner.

§ April 26. Jeffrey Cool came into my cubicle this morning, asking how my weekend at Hearst Castle went. "Fine", I said, turning from my computer screen with what I hoped was a face devoid of the irritation I felt at hearing his voice and seeing his smirking face first thing this morning,

"So, you went on all four tours."

"Yes."

"You must be tired."

"No, I'm not tired."

"You look tired."

Well *thanks*, I thought. There was a bit of egg lodged in his beard.

§ May 2. My birthday weeklong extravaganza is over. I'm both relieved and sad. Birthdays can be so stressful, the anticipation, the aging, the excitement, the determination to "have a good time." But that's not to say that I didn't *have* a good time; I did (too much of one, I should think.) Rather, I find *planned* hilarity to be mostly disappointing; it's much better to be spontaneous.

spoiled rich homologous children. Josh was enlisted by the prestigious local swim team, assuring his future as top-notch fraternity material. Mother talked about his future possible scholarships to exalted universities. My brother amassed trophies to be displayed where the African masks would have hung. Our house and family were profiled by the local society tabloid. I took to my room and gorged myself on Poe and Maupassant.

Julian and I often ponder what happened to Mother, who once upon a time camped out in a pup tent with my Father in Big Sur, who studied philosophy, religion, and music theory, and read Russian novels. Who invented original, if inedible, dishes inspired by the Japanese and the Nomads of the Sahara. Who threw cocktail parties for my fathers friends and colleagues at UCLA, offering up green olives wrapped in bacon, gin & tonics, and Marcel Dupré on the hi-fi. My Mother, who irresponsibly blew a \$2000 birthday gift from her parents on a puce coloured coat (much to my Father's dismay, as he didn't earn much money.) My Mother, who drove a Renault R5 in the '60s, when most Americans were still driving Buicks. My Mother, who took me to the symphony, to museums, to plays, who loved nature, who was interested in indigenous peoples, who thought it terrible when "progress" destroyed the environment and lovely old buildings.

She was interesting. She was cultured. What happened to her, that she now mocks art, and *arty types*, calling it, them, "affected"? Who reads *The Chronicles* and "exposés" written by conservative political pundits? Who thinks that global warming is a hoax, that the preservation of land is an affront to private property rights? Whose life revolves around DAR meetings and bridge tournaments in Acapulco? Was she so hurt by the failed relationship with Father that she altered her entire world outlook and lifestyle? Was she fed bad drugs at a University party? Hit over the head in a dark alley? Or did her chemical make-up change dramatically while pregnant with Josh? My brother, raised A.D., after the decadence, didn't have the same formative experiences as did I. He turned out to be one of the most stupidly vehement conservative *command*s, ever. But I wonder how much of it is environmental? Could he have influenced my Mother *in vitro*, like some sort of evil spawn right-wing alien child?

§ April 20. Sebastian Tooeys book has arrived this morning. Apparently it was sent by pony express; he sent it weeks ago and I'd quite given up on it *ever* arriving. Sebastian, who I've met only recently, is the most delightful man, older, which makes sense, given my taste and bearing – I'm hopelessly antiquated, don'tcha know? Like me, he wishes he could go back in time, is terribly romantic, appreciates wit and intelligence (which makes me wonder what he sees in *me*), and is most appreciative of writers, writing, their emotional & psychological bags and baggage.

So now, along with Carmella's novella, and Andrew's recent draft of his novel, I've more to read from my peers – I don't know how I shall find the time to do all this, and continue with my own precarious reading schedule. More disturbing, is the nagging voice at the back of my mind, "When are *you* to write something of substance? Why all this dithering journal stuff? Surely, this won't be all you accomplish in life? Endless platitudes and insular tirades? Or, are you afraid that you're *incapable* of writing fiction?" Nuts.

§ April 24. We've just returned from a long weekend: Big Sur, Hearst Castle, and all points thereabout. Hearst Castle, San Simeon, deserves all its accolades and superlatives, but I find it difficult to warm up either to Hearst himself, or to Marian Davies, his film star consort (whom the tour guides so decorously describe as his "companion"). As a child, I remember Hearst

was no standoff, merely a respite from the hard-boiled variety. I'd prepare myself for a new battle each morning as I sat down at table. Praying for cereal, those fried yellow bits of noxious poison, emitting fetid, deadly vapors, made my stomach turn. Their appearance was guaranteed every birthday and holiday, my Mother armed with unopened presents and trips to Disneyland as bargaining chips. I, meanwhile, was quite the subterfuge virtuoso with the quick egg drop to the lap and into the napkin, the staged removal of fork from mouth when mother turned back to scrutinize, and finally, the smiling feigning of chewing and swallowing. "Now, that wasn't so bad, was it? You'll thank me when you're older."

I'm long past the days of eggs, and the religious connotations of Easter shouldn't affect me; I am not religious. Still, I find Easter to be the most melancholy and useless of holidays. Each year, I'm filled with a sadness I can't explain, to be shaken off with walks to Huntington park where we size up the Easter bonnets on the heads of San Francisco patricians leaving morning mass at Grace Cathedral, on their way to fancy family luncheons at the neighboring hotels of halcyon days. I imagine the toasts, the table settings, the family members: pink faced, bespotted *grande dames* and patriarchs, angel-haired children in pastel frocks and sailor suits, sullen, beautiful teenagers, magnificent in their guileless knowing, wooden, uninspiring middle-aged aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers. But this year, Julian was ill with the grippie, so we were trapped in our beautiful prison, with everything one could want at hand, and yet, I was sad, and bored, and irritable, and annoyed that I should feel that way.

§ April 13. I've put aside *Within a Budding Grove* for the moment for *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living, 1900-1939*. It's an utter delight, with chapter subheadings like:

Why do artists despise money?
How does one survive while producing something that no one will buy?
What do one's clothes tell people about one's beliefs?
Does one have to wear what other people wear?
Are creativity and cookery compatible?
Where do Bohemians dine out?
Is it preferable for English people to live in England, or is France better?
Is it necessary to stay in one place?
What do Bohemians want out of life?
How can one recognize a Bohemian interior?
Does one really need furniture?
How can one live beautifully and cheaply?

It seems this book is to answer many of my own questions, a sort of handbook of "otherly living". Would someone please write a similar book, only from an American standpoint? When I think of the characters we've produced, but perhaps it's not nearly as compelling, when one considers that Americans have traditionally "escaped" to California, and other idylls for "free" living and thinking. And then the size of our country is problematic, the variety of subcultures. Southerners, Northerners, Texans, Southern Californians, Northern Californians, Midwesterners. I expect one's origin would affect how they react to any of these questions, so how could anyone write a book without generalizing horribly? And then, there are so many subsets, so many "ecosystems" of Bohemians in this country, the Greenwich Village crowd, the San Francisco squad, in every city

and metro area, there was, is, a nucleus of Bohemia, around which satellites of creativity move. Americans are mobile within their own country, and yet, we're isolated. Moving to the continent, though perhaps easier in times past, isn't as simple an endeavor as it is for Englishmen (although Andrew is doing a damn fine job of making a new life for himself in Nantes). Mexico has been an option for some, and Canada beckons for many, but most of us find our niches here, in subcultures, in communities of the like-minded.

I wonder then,

How has the Internet changed Bohemia? Is publication on the Internet a valid option? Do artists still despise money? Or is art now just a commodity? Should artists be taught marketing & accounting, along with technique and theory? Is it still possible to survive while producing things that no one will buy? Does "Bohemian" garb still say "artist"? Or, has "artistic" dress been appropriated by the masses? How can one recognize a Bohemian interior, since "Bohemian" has gone mainstream? Is it possible, still, to live beautifully & cheaply?

And when I think of my own, and Julian's, wanderlust, I wonder, why do Bohemians oft feel that it's necessary to go someplace else in order to find fulfillment? Are they looking for other Bohemians? Are they escaping anti-Bohemian sentiment? Is it a romanticism of the "other" place? Is it because they need to escape the familia?

§ April 14. Darline came into our weekly meeting this morning wearing earrings which can only be described as looking exactly like Carr's Water Crackers painted with prieffrey coloured acrylic paints. Does she know how ugly they are? But they match her hand knit sweater exactly. Her earrings *always* match her outfits perfectly. Today, it's a bulky hand knit sweater, diagonally striped in fat swales of red, purple, black, and white, red pants, black socks, and purple shoes – hideous, however, I will say, that at least Darline has her own "look" (it's a "look" alright), and doesn't blend in anonymously with the herd, though I wonder if it's a little *ignominious*, none-the-less? If I had too choose, would I dress like Darline, or like Jeffrey Cool, who, in the many years I've worked with her (eight, to be exact), has always looked exactly the same: bland, a khaki uniform apparently bought from J.Crew, fine mail-order putveyors, and outfitters of the fashionably indelbound herd?

But I shouldn't make fun of Darline, or for that matter, Jeffrey. One could say the same of me, I fear, that my outfits are "unique", that I've a "look", which is why I ultimately defend Darline and her appalling outfits (Jeffrey's on her own.) One only wishes that she'd steer clear of earrings that look like primary school art projects, colour combinations for which nature never intended, and sweaters which distressingly add to her already horrifying bulk.

Why must I be so hateful and caty? I wonder if my own insecurities drive me to these snotty judgments. Ultimately, unhappily, I suspect I am a snob, one who denigrates others to make themselves feel better about their own precarious social position. But am I really?

I'd like to think that I am *not* a snob. I abhor obvious displays of perceived social superiority, "designer" totems, and rude behaviour towards one's supposed "inferiors". And yet, don't my own actions smack of these same things, albeit in different disguises? Etruscan rings? Outré getups? Obscure tastes in film and music? Recondite literature? Endless critical essays bemoaning America's cultural illiteracy? Can you say, "reverse snobbery?"

I've begun to read Joseph Epstein's *Snobbery* to either confirm or nullify my suspicions.

§ April 15. Carmella has given me a manuscript of a novella on which she's been working. I love it. Modern, immediate, uncomplicated, compelling. She, of anyone in my immediate group of writer friends, Julian, Andrew, me, is most likely to be published, I believe. How I hope she is successful! Talented Carmella, who is, regardless, successful, in my eyes, at everything she attempts. Her artwork is among the most beautiful I've ever seen; her use of colour, her innate *knowing* of colour, rivals that of Odilon Redon, and yet she considers herself a failure of sorts, because she was never a commercial success. How often I've told her that to be a commercial success means nothing, when I think of the trite crap that passes for art nowadays, of the undisguised pandering to the masses, the marketing, the "dumbing down", to use an overly used, never-the-less apt expression, of *all* the arts. Her less talented friends, some of them, have garnered media attention and important gallery shows, but these artists, I keep telling her, are courted by gallery owners, and ultimately successful, because of they have mass appeal; their work looks good in rich people's minimalist living rooms, but "there's no 'there' there", to quote Gertrude Stein.

As a child, I remember asking,

"Mother, why doesn't everyone else like what I do? Why don't they realize how good it is? Why is the best [music, film, literature, visual art] not more popular? Why am I so singular in my tastes?"

"Because," she'd answer, "most people can't understand or appreciate good art. There is only small segment of society who have the ability and intelligence to do so. Anything that is popular is so because it has mass appeal, and most people aren't very smart and aren't very sophisticated. If something is popular, if something has mass appeal, if everyone likes it, you can bet that it's commonplace and standard. Furthermore, *you* will not like it. People like us, are doomed to be forever out of step with 'society', because our tastes are in the minority."

"What you will find, is that what you dearly like, what you prefer, may come to be popular," she continued, "because there are those who will fall into step behind those they perceive as having rarified tastes. There are trend-followers, and taste-makers. It is always better to be a taste-maker than a trend-follower, even so, it is distressing when the followers ruin what was once a fine pleasure, making it vulgar, making it common. Trend-followers are grasping mercenaries who have no real grasp on, or ability to form tastes. Remember that, and never feel cowed nor demoté because you aren't *one of them*."

Wise words from my Mother, who, before my brother was born, was somewhat the bohemian. Rather, she *played* at being bohemian, since she never exactly lived her life for art. She was a crack interior decorator, an inventive cook, and dressed *very* well. She fraternized with interesting people, and was very well read. My father, on the other hand, was a musician and composer, a real bohemian type if there ever was one. Following their divorce, after she'd married an electrical engineer and moved to the suburbs, after my brother came along, she'd irrevocably changed. But I suppose it was always there, the bridge-playing, the sorority girl ideas, the DAR snobbery, the conservative opinions, the WASPiness lurking just beneath the artist model exterior. My father obviously brought out the best in her: African masks, flocked velvet wallpaper, Mexican tiled floors, jeweled sandals, exotic (but expensive!) clothing, innovative cooking, Nabîs-ish paintings, and music all the time emanating from our carved walnut grand piano, or hi-fi. The African masks disappeared, the enormous Persian rugs were sold for a song (she's never understood the value of *things*), the piano was given to repellant yacht owning relatives in Bellingham. Meanwhile, I was taken out of my progressive, private school to attend the local public school crammed with

website when it was launched, proud, and counting on him not to say a thing; I thought of him as one my closest friends. And even when Sandy mentioned to me one day that Jamie was wondering what had happened to the infamous website, *Fièvre de Cerveau*, I didn't suspect a thing. I told her everything; I figured I might as well, how I'd been confronted by Mr. Parent, how I had no idea who it was, how I thought that someone had merely Googled me, then followed the links from my online magazine articles (where I'd stupidly used my real name.)

But then, it occurred to me later, months later, that it must have been Sandy who'd gone to Mr. Parent. Everyone else in my department was acting with customary jollity, even Eleanor Reardon, who'd I'd assumed, initially, was the guilty party. After our last day long meeting, when I'd sat with Eleanor all day, whispering, passing notes, smirking at the back of the room, I began to look elsewhere for this *com*, this repellant human being who'd ruined a perfectly good website in order to make herself seem fair and right-minded.

It had been Sandy, no one else, who'd asked me about *Fièvre de Cerveau*. She said that Jamie had told her about it, just as he'd told her about my interview in Iowa, another secret I'd asked him to keep. It had to be her, it had to be him, meeting for a gossipy lunch every Tuesday, oh so cozy. Jamie, who seems to seek out the über-crone, wherever he works, who then hangs on for "networking" purposes once he's left.

Having told her that I thought the person who turned me in was a coward, and a jerk, and clearly didn't understand what I was getting at (self-deprecation that is), I feel, in retrospect, that things couldn't have turned out better. The joke is on Sandy. There is no way she'll ever find *this* website.

I will not discuss this Jamie. He clearly can't be trusted and he is not a good friend. Talking about this further, I think, could only hurt, and I think him capable of lying. Regrettably, it is best to drop him, and my gut feeling is to stay very far away. I do not like gossips, and I had never considered him one, but he appears to be gossiping with über-crone Sandy. Sandy, 300 pounds, who listens to anger management tapes, who keeps drawer loads of candy bars at her desk, who is nice as pie to your face, who hates me for being me.

It is so terribly disconcerting to know that people are talking about me, and yet, I suppose it's good that they are. It's nice to be worth talking about. I just don't want to suffer the consequences. When I think of Sandy and Jamie having read my personal journals, I cringe, Jamie, only because I've discovered what a traitor he is. Sandy, because I picture her at home with her sister, snugg, cranning Ho-Hos down her pie-hole, screeching, "Listen to this!" to her sister, her lifelong roommate. She knows the *real* me, beneath the me I present to the world, and this disturbs me. I did not invite her in. The gibbering mob who find me via the internet, this is another matter entirely - to them, I am anonymous in all other respects.

§ October 11, 2004. The days just slide by. I've no real concept of time, it seems, any longer. I sleep twelve, thirteen, fourteen hours a day, reading until after midnight, limiting my television and film consumption to the French channel, and those films and travel programs we bring home from the library Sundays - Hungary, Prague, Jan Svankmajer, Claude Chabrol. Life becomes more and more removed from reality, surreal.

The sun moves farther to the south, leaving us in shadow until mid-afternoon. In the evenings, after the sun has disappeared behind the cylinders of flats on Cathedral Hill, we part the green silk curtains. I saw a bat fly through the dusk not so long ago.

gal, but I'm really just an introspective, somewhat asocial person, ruminative, and guilty. Guilty because I blame myself for other's rotten times, because I'm the one who doesn't fit in.

There are times, for example, when I start a new job, or fire myself up to attend a Christmas party, or some such, that I'm able to emanate an extroverted, highly social personality. But it is false, I think generated from nerves and the sick need to be accepted, left over no doubt from my childhood spent as the last picked, weird looking girl who lived in the odd house at the end of the road, pale and strangely dressed, eating peculiar lunches, and reading, always reading. And because it is false, I can't keep it up, and people who thought they'd sized me up, who thought I was a-okay, are left feeling baffled or hurt. I once worked with a guy who seemed angry when he figured me for what I really was, "Yeah, I see how you are now. You don't fool me anymore. You want everyone to think you're just some kind of dumb party girl, but really, you're smart. You're just sittin' back and lookin' at everyone, judgin' 'em, considering what they're made of." We were alone together in the break room at the tire factory, and he frightened me. He'd been drinking some, I could smell it on his breath, and he seemed angry that I'd "fooled" him.

After work today, waiting for the shuttle, Jimmy called me a Valley Girl, another example of how people can't fathom the real me. On my part, I can't understand how Jimmy *could* call me a Valley Girl, I'm nothing of the sort. Sure, I grew up in Laguna Beach, but that's as far from The Valley as you can get, and I've no accent to speak of. If anything, I've been mistaken for English more than anything. Mother went to English boarding schools, and so her speech, its cadence and vocabulary is wrought with anglicisms, and so is mine. And yet, a boob like Jimmy calls me a Valley Girl. I don't dress like a Valley Girl, I suppose. I've always viewed my dress as 1920s Paris meets Morticia Addams, very *Henry and June* Anais Nin/June Miller, or Natasha Rambova without the braids, but definitely *not* Valley Girl.

§ June 8, 2004. Thank goodness for Turner Classic Movies. I suppose I've said this before, but I repeatedly think it. I sometimes wonder what my life would be like without them. It really sounds rather pathetic to say so, doesn't it? Frankly, I'd watch a lot less television, but I'd have less totems from the past to cling to. I like to contemplate the effect that these old films have on my psyche and on my writing. I told Julian that the novel he's writing rather reads like a '50s film noir, something with William Holden, so perhaps we've both been affected.

§ June 9, 2004. I've just finished reading *We Got the Neutron Bomb: the Untold Story of L.A. Punk* and *Make the Music go Bang! the Early L.A. Punk Scene*, reading practically non-stop the last few days. It all brings back memories of growing up in Southern California. I wonder if my fond memories have more to do with my youth, than what actually happened. It's easy to be enthusiastic when young, when there is so much to discover in life. Still, it was an important period of time artistically.

I miss most the setting, the abandoned warehouses downtown, the authentic little diners and restaurants, the independent record shops, the weird little *outré* boutiques where you could buy strange jewelry, books, and other counter-culture accessories. The hole-in-the-wall clubs, one heard about by word of mouth, entering through a back alley, where beer was served by the can, where art met punk met the urgent need to break out of the generic blandness of American life as we'd known it, growing up in faceless, soulless suburban developments *ad nauseam*. I was too young to be living on my own, but I knew that there were interesting places to live in old

Hollywood, apartment buildings that had housed silent film starlets in better days, crumbling art deco storefronts displaying the bizarre art of its occupants, derelict old mansions filled with ghosts. Before eighties urban renewal, there were still stretches of deserted downtowns, in Hollywood, in Los Angeles, in Long Beach, where tumbleweeds would have blown, had there been tumbleweeds to blow. Where down-at-the-heels, once elegant theatres showed art film, a last gasp before they'd be torn down or multiplexed. Where dark little bars were home to Butowskiesque characters who would sometimes reel out into the street, incoherent stories of by gone glory days spilling from their lips with the aches and gnawing of hopelessness and defeat. Downtown, there were cautious thrift stores which seemed to go on forever, filled with the detritus of flappers, wise-guys, and jitter-buggers, cast aside, unloved, homeless, yours for a buck, if you had a buck, until the "thrift-store look" was appropriated by the beautiful people, and then the masses.

Growing up in the suburbs, these deserted, broken downtowns were to me, the authentic, the beautiful. I loved the old buildings with their empty grimy old windows. From the top of the Farmer's and Merchant's Bank in Long Beach, my friends and I, we'd commune with the spirits of the haunted city, watch the moon rise, and plot our revolution in '50s prom dresses, and rosary beads, wild-haired, wild-eyed, hungry for truth. We were rabid for our contemporary, underground culture, we were desperate to find one another and bond, however antisocial that bonding actually was. There'd be a look of recognition when we encountered one another in a suburban supermarket or shopping mall. There was a solidarity between us, like some sort of secret society, though we wore our membership badges in full sight, our dress, our hair, our scrawny bodies and pale faces in a sea of athletic and tanned young lemmings.

We've all dropped the posturing and dress (or have we?), and our interests in music, art, and literature has matured (or has it?). But my attitude hasn't changed a bit, my disdain for status symbols, for corporate product and hype, my search for the authentic, my refusal to be pushed, or bossed around. These others, my friends, though the faces have changed, though they did not grow up where I did, also sought entrance to the same club of independent misfits. We find each other, we have the same ethics and world views, and I wonder if we're more a product of the time we grew up in, rather than rejects from the good citizen factory. I've little to nothing in common with today's fringe element, indeed, I doubt that in America today it could even exist or flourish. Independence of spirit is the most threatening of things to the status quo, to middle America, to the family values ilk, and they've stamped it out pretty efficiently, though many would disagree with me. What passes for "alternative" today, what professes to be provocative is cleverly executed product from America's cultural manufacturing plants. I see no evidence of grass root or do-it-yourself artistry. Much of the problem is that money is now the über-God of Americans, the young especially. I see them swaggering around downtown with their "bling-bling", in their designer jeans and sneakers du jour. *There is nothing that is subversive.* All these touchstones of the rap generation are endorsed by, made by, and pushed by corporate America. Their heroes are empty shells, with neither intelligence, artistry, or soul, grasping and money-grubbing braggarts, drinking Cristal champagne, living in McMansions stuffed with aquariums and black leather couches, driving cars which are the stuff of adolescent fantasies.

We're living in a cultural vacuum. I'm waiting for the next revolutionaries, the next great subversive hope of America. I'm waiting. I will wait.

It was all downhill from there. This last week she stopped repeatedly at my desk on her walks around the room, observing us draw behind our backs (something that makes me extremely uncomfortable), for some friendly little confrontational chats. I was busy drawing our live, nude model, Carol.

"I don't know if you just don't want to do this assignment, Lucie, or if you are tired of it, or if you just don't understand the assignment," she said, stage whispering for everyone else's benefit.

"Maybe I'm just incapable of it," I sarcastically mumbled, looking straight ahead, drawing big gaping skeletal pits where Carol's eyes should have been. I was fed-up and bored with her gestural approach to drawing.

She made a grab for the used pages of my pad, "But you've done this before, Lucie, just look"

"That's just the point. Can I just work on this *please*."

She left. Several minutes went by. She came around again, stopping first to observe me behind my back. I petulantly put my graphite pencil down - I will not work while she watches me. She sidled up next to me, a crab in denim with freckles and long brown hair.

"I just hope you can get something positive out of this class, Lucie." Her tone was wheedling, the volume a stage whisper, once again. Beneath it all I could sense her exasperation, her anger. I wasn't cooperating, I wasn't grung-lo, I didn't fawn all over her during our breaks like my middle-aged female classmates did. I sulked outdoors with my yogurt; in class I frequently looked at my watch. I must have seemed bored, unhappy. I've never been so good at disguising my moods, but then again, I was not trying to. I feel nothing but contempt for this jaunty kindergarten teacher, who announced at our first meeting that she played basketball in college. I'm here to fulfill a pre-requisite, and nothing more.

I went home that day wondering if I should send her an email, telling her forthwith to ignore me, to pretend I don't exist. But I won't do that. I will continue to go to class, to be stullen, to be difficult, to make her life at the Institute a pain. I don't go out of my way to do this, I mind my own business, but I refuse to play up to her, to be something I'm not, to pretend to feel enthusiasm for something that I see as the stides and stones of greater stuff, like a typing class is to the writer; it's nothing more. Dull, dull, dull.

Our first day in class she had us each fill out a questionnaire, asking us to list our favorite artists, and works of art that inspired us. I bristled, as I do, when asked to give out information like this, on the fly, without context. I sensed that she would use this sort of information to size us up, to judge us, what else could it be used for? Why should it matter who we like? I putposely picked the most obscure and disturbing artists I could think of, to confuse her, and explain in my neatest hand that, "I'm inspired more by works of literature and film than I am by paintings or drawings." I wonder if she knows who Felicien Rops or Odilon Redon are?

§ October 10, 2004. Jamie's just called. He's called to inquire after my broken toes. I feel rather strange, and slightly violated when I find that people have been talking about me. I didn't tell Jamie, nor did Julian. That means that Sandy Campbell and Jamie have been talking about me, again.

I figured out several weeks ago, like a light suddenly going off above my head, that it was Jamie and Sandy who were to blame for the website fiasco at work. I had told Jamie about my

Paris (my own!), a Citroën DS, endless travel in Europe, Prague, Budapest, Venice, Barcelona, winters in Scotland.

I will buy the hat.

§ **October 5, 2004.** I've just returned from hospital, where kind Doctor Wilson set my three broken toes. One was broken in two places, and the other two had been broken jaggedly in half. These two were spiraled around, so that my toes jutted out at odd angles, and felt not at all normal. I now have my toes wrapped in gauze and tape, a fancy shoe upon my foot, outfitted with Velcro straps and plastic buckles.

What brought this on? Little Miss Dinah Moppet, that's what. And the shopping bags which formed a kind of low ground fog, covering obstacles like an outcropping of wall, a dainty escargot bed leg, and a carpet covered "cat tube". Somewhere in this morass, I slid, then gave my foot a good whack while trying to find my balance, Dinah panicking, my arms filled with shoe boxes and handbags. I avoided killing Dinah with a crash to the floor, but my toes were sacrificed in the process.

I've a nice new pair of shoes, just bought an hour before the accident, which Julian promptly dubbed my Anais Nin shoes. Off they'll go to Francisco the Argentine cobbler to be soled. Alas, I will not be able to wear the Anais Nin shoes for some weeks.

§ **October 7, 2004.** Julian, like Camella, is so self-disciplined. He writes most every afternoon while I loiter in the bathtub with a book for two or three hours, unable to write anything of consequence, neither motivated nor interested. *Alfred* still sits, forlorn, languishing on my desktop after Andrew so painstakingly pointed out its weak spots for me to massage. Since taking up painting this past summer, it is difficult for me to get back to writing; instead of helping me, the painting seems to have preoccupied me.

What I love so much about painting, is that it comes from a part of my brain so much easier accessed. Writing is so damned difficult. Oh, I'm not talking about this journal business, but *real* writing, fiction, that which requires craft and cunning. Journal writing is no more than putting thoughts to paper, there is no plot, there is no character development, there is no need for a clever turn of phrase, though it helps. Anais's journals are what I aspire to, but without constant attention, how can I ever expect to write as she did? Beautifully, thoughtfully, poetically, introspective, but also elevating the mundane of everyday life to high art? I'm so ashamed of my pitiful offerings.

My drawing class, which as met for several Saturdays now at the Art Institute, is a disaster. I loathe the drawing, but a good teacher would at least make it amusing. Our *instructor* is a horror, a thin, maiden aunt sort of person, who wears tight denim. She's overly enthusiastic, too perky, no doubt features which made her a hit with the juvenile crowd at the city museum where she also plies her trade. But what works for po-dunk eight year-olds, does not work with sophisticated urban adults. "Lucie, could you hold up your drawing for the class to see?" "No," I said. "I really encourage you to participate with the others, Lucie." Ugh! I don't want to hold up my drawing for all to see, and I don't want to participate in quasi-*sharing* activities, like some sort of pre-schooler, which will only foster competitiveness in a class full of successful adults.

§ **June 14, 2004.** I've begun Kafka's diaries. Without using superlatives, without sounding like a gushing teenager, I don't think I can properly relate how much I love this man's writing. It's astounding to me that such talent could exist. I will never be able to write like him, or like anyone I admire. I don't think I have it in me, the poetry, the metaphor, the ability to twist a surprising, delightful bit of phrase, as does he, as does Andrew, as does Proust, and Nin, and Henry Miller, and Bruno Schultz.

Dinner of hamburger helper, green beans, salad, and cheesecake at Lance and Max's. Lance has arranged for us to see unit 907 tomorrow evening, a corner studio with a view of north of Nob Hill and west towards the sea. If we like it, we may try to buy it, selling our own east facing unit, which has proved to be stuffy and plagued with noise from the playground, patio, and buses grunting by on O'Farrell. A corner at the other end of the building would allow us cross ventilation, more ambient light, and most important, the full brunt of winter storms pounding at our windows! How I miss the storms! We'll need to investigate thoroughly though, as the street noise could be considerably worse.

§ **June 15, 2004.** 907 was in good shape, the walls were all in place (unlike 1507, whose owners stupidly removed most of them), and the noise didn't seem too terribly awful, though we will need to spend some time there unmolested, quietly, to really assess the situation. To move fills me with a mixture of excitement and dread; there is so much stress involved. It would really be easier to just stay where we are, but as Julian so wisely pointed out, once the process has finished, we would be much happier, the aggravation of the playground and its shrieking kids, and the patio with its barking dogs removed. And to be able to sleep, in cool foggy air would be heaven. Here, we're plagued with the miasma of our stagnant sleeping alcove at the back of a cave of a studio.

§ **June 16, 2004.** Andrew has sent back his analysis and comments on "Alfred". He said everything that Julian said, and more, in great detail. How I appreciate his critique. I need to show, to prove, using more illustration, more colour. But what's new, and what I'd never considered, is that the time frame is flawed. I have a great deal of work to do, but put it off until later this week, when I'm home alone, and I can write to the comforting hum of the archaic turns of speech on TCM.

All artists have a routine, a magic setting that enables them to work at their best, that helps to unlock those parts of the mind that hold the precious bits. I write best in the morning, after I've just gotten up. I put on the kettle, and make myself a bit of toast. I turn on TCM and adjust the volume so it's barely audible, so that if I wanted to pay attention, I could just make out the dialog, but it's not so loud as to distract me. I cannot work while listening to music, so if the film program includes a musical, I change over to TV5. I'd be unable to work in a café, or anywhere else where conversation would drift in and take over. To work in silence would be worst of all, I think. There is something about, there is something I need, from low level mid-twentieth century dialog and incidental music, something that either lulls me, or hypnotizes me into a lucid state so that words flow easily.

§ **June 18, 2004.** My second painting class last night, and I'm beginning to get to know the different characters in my class: Elinor, a thirty-something mother of one, hell bent on getting an MFA (but for what, I wonder?); Clarence, tall, elderly, titanium white hair, who's dabbled in

watercolours, but who prefers oils, “because if you don’t like what you’ve done, you can just scrape it all off the canvas and start again”; Wheeler, a tall, square-jawed, John Wayne hunk of a Chinese man; and finally, Veronica, a tall redhead, a compulsive talker, who before class was engaged in asking everyone if they “wanted to save the world.” She must have wisely sensed that to broach such a subject with me would have been unwise. Man is a useless passion, as Jean-Paul Sartre so eloquently said, and I quite agree. But later, she did turn to me, bored with her other neighbors, “What do you do? Do you have kids? Do you have a dog? Do you have a cat? Do you have a bird? Do you have a husband? Where do you live?” “The Tenderloin”, I finally answered. “Oooh, but that’s a bad place, isn’t it?” she half-way said to herself. She grew quiet. I can’t wait to see what sort of horrific crap she’ll inevitably paint.

Why do people think they can just start grilling one with questions the moment they’ve met you? Either they’re trying to size one up, based upon superficial information (lives in Russian Hill: good, lives in Tenderloin: bad), or they’re just stupid, insensitive conversationalists. There’s a theory out there for shy, aspiring socializers, that getting people to talk about themselves is a grand idea. What hasn’t been specifically expressed, is that it’s rotten and invasive to pry into people’s personal lives, nor does everyone like to talk about themselves. I love to talk about ideas, about art, about people and things in general, but loathe discussing my life with people I’ve only just met. Where I live, what I do for a living, and what kind of pets I keep: it’s all arbitrary, it’s all so unimportant.

§ July 15, 2004. And so it’s time to write again. There has been no mental capacity for writing nor anything else creative (save my oil painting class Thursday nights) for the last month or so. All thoughts have been on financing, money juggling, decorating, and “do-it-yourself” improvements. I cannot read, I cannot concentrate on anything more demanding than reruns of “The Addams Family” or remodeling reality shows. It has been exciting and stressful, but a good sort of stress, because finally after three and one half years, we are getting our corner apartment with the view north to Nob Hill, and west to the seas, the sunsets, and the storms. How I’ve missed seeing the Western sky, the fog blowing in thick tufts, the sea being storm of its fleece, a deep comforter of gloom, the powerful languid winter storms which beat upon western windows, great grey arctic rushes of wind and waves!

We’ll see trees now, the ones which line our street, the ones which surprise us by their presence, poking up through dimly lit back yards, forgotten with the ivy and detritus of ninety years worth of tenets, Hopperesque rooftops below, buildings huddling against the dimly lit edges of alleys, their glorious brick backs riddled with warmly lit eyes, alive with the movement of a hundred flickering televisions, a hundred drones in palmamas, fussing over their day end banalities. From our new windows we’ll see the Gothic architecture of Grace Cathedral, modeled on Notre Dame de Paris; we’ll see the grand deco high-rises of Nob and Russian Hills; we’ll see the flash of neon from Van Ness Avenue, reminders of the glory days of great American cities.

We’ll be at the end of a hallway, removed, away from the guy across the hall, who slams his door on each movement in or out of his apartment; away from the girl next door who practices her bass guitar scales hours each day; away from the working girl down the hall who “entertains” at all hours, leaving her door open to flood the hallways with strawberry scented incense and the smoke of cheap cigarettes. There will be a new floor to discover, new neighbors to alienate. I wonder who the denizen across the hall from our new apartment could be, a proud American eagle shaped

settings - I’m dually dragged into it, both kicking & screaming (stupid gratuitous sex I know will be shoved down our throats) *and* anticipatory (costumes, interiors, Paris)

I’ve lost another pound. I’ve another 28 minutes to kill.

§ October 1, 2004. Carmella came for lunch and conversation today. She looked beautiful, a *gaycon manqué*, no make-up, no frills, slim in jeans and a no-nonsense New York boutique blouse and jacket. We talked of our writing, of our art, the paintings I did over the summer (which she *loved*), the drawing class I’m taking at the institute, her workshops, her editor, her upcoming trip to the coast with Gary.

I made a shrimp and consious salad, with mint, and chickpeas, and raisins, and almonds. For dessert, I served orange and cranberry cookies I’d made the day before. We drank Calistoga, and later, Russian tea.

Carmella loved, she *gushed*, over our new apartment, its decor, my designs, the colours, Julian’s decoupage, “You have a good eye, you’re a natural. You’ve got a gift,” she said, over and over. I suppose I do. She encourages me to become a professional, to take classes, but I’ve no interest in it, really. Only where it concerns me. I suppose it would be fun to be a consultant of sorts, to aid people in finding what they want, to help them to find their style, but to “do” houses? No. Not now, anyway.

How I value Carmella’s friendship. And to think I was ready to give her up only five months ago. I am continually reminded that no one is perfect, and that no one person can be everything to me. Carmella comes close, but only with the boundaries that keep our friendship intact.

§ October 4, 2004. I’ve lost another pound.

I awoke this morning thinking about the Russian mink toque hat, dyed to look like leopard. How snugly it fit over my ears, how handsome it was, how beautiful it looked on me. I pictured myself strolling through St-Germain-des-Près on snowy day, hands in my pockets, my pink alligator bag over my shoulder, contemplating the shop windows, on my way for lunch at La Palette or Au Bon St-Pourcan with Julian - *pot-au-feu*, or *poulet estragon*, I should think.

I remember when I was quite poor, just out of college (and then some), “If only I made \$\$,” I’d think. “Then I could buy what I want, live life the way I would like to. How comfortable I should be.” I soon made \$\$, but this only took me to a new, higher level of acceptable lifestyle standards. I had new fancy friends to socialize and go to dinner with. I therefore wanted to live in a hipper neighborhood, wear better clothes, travel to Europe, go back to school. “If only I could make \$\$\$,” I thought. “Then, I will be happy. Then, I will have everything I need.”

And then I made \$\$\$, I went back to school, I went to Europe, I lunchminded, and dined, and parted with my fancy friends, I shopped at Department Store Y. “How could I have stood it otherwise,” I wondered, the mobs, the traffic, the picked over crap. But then, I longed to buy my own house, rent an apartment in Paris, and buy designer jewelry from Department Store Z, Department Store Z, which I *never would have stepped into* before. “If only I made \$\$\$\$, then, I could buy what I like, dress how I’d like, eat where I want, travel how and when I desire.” But I realize it’s a non-stop spiral to new plateaus of lifestyle expectations. It never ends, really. I can see how even with twice as much money as I earn now, I would still want more: an apartment in

of owls, the crackling of branches, and stars so cold and far away. How I love the north coast, the haunted and ghostly coast of old cypresses and heavy fog, the old graveyards which overlook the ocean, full of drowned sailors, and babies.

§ **Wednesday, September 29, 2004.** September has practically slipped away. A quiet afternoon at work, with not much to do, listening to Radio Disnuké, jacking with my email filters, counting down the minutes until it's time to catch the bus to the train station.

This morning on the train I overheard two spectacularly ugly, and loud, women remark to one to the other, "Ooooh, lookit all the people on the platform." "It's just like New York!" nodded the other in agreement. I sat sullenly reading "Trading Up : The New American Luxury", which has been quite the disappointment. Not at all what I thought it would be. Instead of biting social commentary on the empty lives of status-seeking Americans, it reads like a marketing text for go-getting young entrepreneurs hoping to carve a niche for themselves.

I've bought a Salvador Dalí finger puppet. His curli-que mustaschios, black suit, and bobbed black hair won my heart. I'm sure that if I were a man I too would wear curli-que mustachios, not to mention damask suits and alligator shoes. I'd probably provoke all kinds of unwanted attention.

A woman fled from me in horror Monday at Whole Foods Market. I had at first thought she was responding to a bin of rotting lettuce bits, which had affected me most unpleasantly, but later, after another display of arm waving, groans, and pantomimed dying of stink in the dry foods department, I sensed it was me she was responding so rudely to, and not the lettuce. I stalked her down another aisle, just to reassure myself that it was indeed me who was inspiring such childish behaviour. She let out an audible groan at the sight of me, whirled around, shopping cart and all (almost upsetting a stroller in the process), and fled the other direction towards the shampoos, scented candles, and bottled patchouli oils, much to my delight.

I profess that I do wear perfume, and not a little, but I don't suppose that I wear too very much, though it is powerful stuff, earthy, exotic, transporative, as they say; I can see how people would either love, or hate it violently. Still! How terribly rude of her to make such a production of it. She must have a terrible time getting on in this world. I dare say, if she is so very sensitive, it's questionable whether she should be out in public at all. And shouldn't the odour of rotting lettuce have disturbed her more than my scent? Rotting lettuce is one of the worst smells of all, in my opinion.

My new puce boots are swell, though I've come to find that they are not puce in colour after all; only the lining is, which I'd been calling purple. So, what I'd thought of as puce, is really chartreuse, which is no problem, though the fact that they're flawed is. Just inside, at the most delicate part of the back of my heel, is a weird fold of leather, a defect. This fold feels like a stick jammed deep into my shoe, unnoticeable when I first lace them up, but progressively excruciating as the day wears on. I'm to take them back to Camper, *sans* receipt, *sans* packaging, to see what they can do.

Carmella comes for lunch tomorrow. I'm to make shrimp salad, and *nucata*, a fabulous medieval recipe of nuts and honey. The salad features mint, couscous, and garbanzo beans – one of my old standbys.

Chimes will be dining with us at Café B— Saturday night, and then to the talkies to see *Head in the Clouds*, something I'd normally avoid like plague were it not for the Parisian *and* 1930s

doorbell squarely put on his front door. I already imagine a WWII veteran, a widowed Filipino with yellowing rheumy eyes and a penchant for boilermakers.

With the money we're making by selling our place (concurrently, to add to the stress, doncha know), we've just enough to do the remodeling basics: paint, carpet, curtains. The paint will be darker than what we've had, a sort of golden taupe. The carpet is a walnut coloured wool from Italy – yes, we are splurging, but I ask you, after you've seen walnut coloured wool carpet from Italy, can you still install synthetic hi-lo from Delaware? The curtains are to be a gold silk, lined and interlined, long enough for soft puddles on the floor, hung from wrought iron curtain rods, which will look ever so good with our 1920's wrought iron chandelier.

There are to be new windows, double hung to open from the top, and double paneled to block noise. We're redoing the bathroom with a 1930's pedestal sink and toilet, a round beveled mirror (no medicine cabinet!), and art deco light fixtures. Our bathroom cabinet, currently white, I will paint a glossy enamel black. The kitchen will have its crumbling tile comertops and backsplash removed, to be replaced with white Italian marble, darkly veined in black and grey. We'll sell the odious new refrigerator which is large enough for a family of five and replace it with an under the counter model which has no freezer (!), topped with butcher block.

Finally, in the dressing room, the sliding closet doors will be replaced with the coral and gold damask curtains we bought in Paris last year on the rue de Bac. The walls will be décapaged with colour copied black and white French postcards from 1900-1930, the beautiful script sides to be put above the molding, and the picture sides below. This is to be our most perfect, our most cozy of nests, 550 square feet of heaven in San Francisco.

There is much plastering for us to do in the kitchen and in the bathroom, and all rooms need paint. I am excited and I am stressed, but I will be relieved when all has finished, and we are ensconced in our extravagant little jewel box. Yes, it is extravagant, but when I consider the money people spend on full sized houses, I consider us to be wise, cunning, clever. Living in a small space allows us the luxury to be luxurious. What extravagant for two humble studio dwellers in San Francisco, would be an outrageous, prohibitive expense in a suburban, three bedroomed home.

§ **July 18, 2004.** A hot early afternoon, and leftover Indian food is in the oven. Julian has left for the library, and TCM is on, a 50's era juvenile delinquent film starring Dennis Hopper. I'm drinking my Russian tea. Miss Moppet is at my side, and Mr. Darcy is under the bed, looking for the cool spot which doesn't exist in this apartment.

Yesterday we went out looking for under counter refrigerators. The refrigerator we want is obscenely expensive. How is it that a refrigerator one third the size of a typical family's should be twice the price? Our travels took us to House of Louis, Economy Restaurant Supply, Floorcraft, and finally Home Depot, where we made arrangements for closet doors to be installed, and bought Julian work gloves, eye protection, and a "cold" chisel to be used for removing kitchen tile. We're both a little trepidatious about doing our own work, but excited, and we will save money. Of course, knowing you've done it yourself is supposed to be best of all – I wonder though.

I'm trying. I'm really trying to get into the right state of mind, where I can think, where I can create, where I can dream of anything else but this new house. It's not that I don't enjoy my obsession, but I can't help but think that I'd be ever so much more interesting if I could think of anything else. I feel like such a real estate boor, so typical for me, and for Julian, to become single minded to the exclusion of all else. We've certainly been that way about France (an obsession

that comes and goes, but is never entirely gone), about groups of writers and their milieu, about historical time periods, certain artists, filmmakers, film stars. I sometimes think that I live through a cycle that corresponds loosely with the seasons. My year begins with.

Fall: England, Ireland, English literature of the mid-twentieth century. Tweed clothes, old leather handbags, funny old hats, brogans, walks through the moors, cottage pie, Guinness, the Mifforde, Evelyn Waugh, Carolyn Blackwood, roaring fireplaces in cozy cottages above a wild sea, stormy skies and dramatic skies. Sage and thyme and buttery sauces. Toast and tea for breakfast. 1920s through 1930s American and English jazz and society dance orchestras. Topiary gardens and the Scotch highlands. Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, Dracula. I begin to watch QVC obsessively – I love to watch the holiday products pushed on people who idealize the holidays. There's something so comforting and horrifying all at once. I love Thansgiving, for the weather, the leaves, the leaden afternoons in crisp weather, the gloves and hats and coats. Christmas, my way, with A Christmas Story and the 1951 version of A Christmas Carol starring Alastair Sim, with Fred Warthing and the Pennsylvanians, our aluminum Christmas tree, and Charlie Brown. No family, no presents, no religious guilt or self-righteousness. I love the autumn most of all.

Winter: Blood red bonedois and Moroccan lamps, heavy incense like Frankincense, Myrrh, Cypress, Patchouli, scented candles and pots of Russian tea, Anais Nin, Bruno Schultz, Kafka, Henry Miller, Baudelaire. Heavy jewelry and dramatic clothing. Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Russian ballerinas, Leos Carax films, dead branches, old keys, 19th century doll heads. Argentine Tango records from the 20s and 30s, Gypsy music, and the soundtracks of Brothers Quay films. Hungarian and German food heavy with paprika, medieval stews, potato and leek soup, clementines, orange and fennel salad. Art deco black and green tiled bathrooms and kitchens. Ma Rainey, the New Orleans Garden District, oak trees dripping with moss. 1930s California, Film Noir, The Postman Always Rings Twice and Sunset Blvd. Our Gang and Bushy Berkeley films, rows of ancient Eucalyptus and Orange tree groves. Silent era Hollywood and its doomed film stars like Barbara La Marr, Clara Bow, and Rudolf Valentino. They're luxurious Hollywood mansions: faux châteaux, Spanish-Mediterranean villas, and English manors.

Spring: France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Paris between the wars. Paris Was A Woman, Women Of The Left Bank, Jean-Pierre Léaud, The Mother And The Whore, Celine And Julie Go Boating, Paris hip, the Nouveau Vague, espadrilles and swingy skirts, Eric Rohmer and Full Moon Over Paris. Amfite. Etiquette books, confessional literature, French culture, American sociology and politics, and French architecture & interiors. Berries and salads and melon. French baguettes from Bay Bread with butter and ham. Shrimp salad with green peppers and garbanzo beans. Fresh flowers, Pride of Madeira, picnicking in the park at Surtro Heights, old San Francisco and old Paris. Walks over Nob and Russian hill to North Beach. Fitzgerald and the Côte d'Azur, Sara and Gerald Murphy, Riviera beauty contests of the 20s and 30s. Julia Morgan architecture, Laguna Beach, beach umbrellas, wading pools, and running through the sprinklers. Isadora Duncan, Harry Crosby, and Nancy Cunard. 19th century trios and Ravel. A time of new beginnings, new projects, and writing furiously. I plot and plan our next trip to Paris. Above all, it's Paris on my mind.

Summer: Stagnation and boredom. Classic horror films, disaster shows, and end of the world dramas. Restlessness with life and my general situation, no matter what it is. It is always in summer that I think seriously about moving. With the hot and sunny days, and the insect crowds of summer, I stay in. I long for thunderstorms and heavy grey clouds, the leaves of fall, my autumn wardrobe, for the tourists to be driven back home to their calico corners and the Mall of America. Nothing satisfies me, not food, nor film, nor music. All is dull and stupid. I await September and

"Okay."

The tables in this room have collected cliquey groups just as they did then. At the back, the fringes, the troublemakers, the outsiders. At the front, management, the teacher's pets, the go-getters, the speech-givers, the sycophants large and small whose whole existence depends upon that "A", better yet, "A+".

They've brought in the desserts, the banquet hall mice. So obsequious, so discreet. But the mice were quite angry and indignant with me this morning, when I asked them for some decent tea, "Can we please have something other than Lipton?" I said, "It makes people sick." "We've never had any complaints before," the head mouse sniffed, but the head mouse did bring me some other tea, his discreet and obsequious nature triumphing over his personal annoyance over spoiled and picky patrons.

But what does one expect at such a function? Decent food? Cloth napkins? Real silverware at luncheon? Those things that one takes for granted at home? Clearly I expect too much from the caterers, who instead supplied us with dreary sandwiches, plastic spoons and knives, and moist towelclutts.

§ Friday, September 24, 2004. The house is finished. The *nouveau maison*, all 550 square feet of it. The walls have been painted, the kitchen in "Ily stem", the living room and sleeping alcove in "golden", and the dressing and bath rooms in "nut butter."

The carpet has been laid ("walnut"), the Mavra area rug has come. The celadon silk curtains have been hung on the wrought iron drapery rods. The new windows have been installed by the Russians, double-hung, double-paned. The "1930" sink has been set up by the Irish – Kieran, Liam, and Diamund, the bathroom tile repaired by plain ol' Jim. The under-the-counter refrigerator has come, been topped by its butcher block crown, and tucked in next to the stove. The new bookcases have been arranged and stuffed with assorted books by Julian, who dotes on these things.

The living room floor lamp was bought from Nest – the one with the startling red shade I couldn't forget about. The coffee table was ordered and has arrived. The custom bathroom mirror, beveled 3/4" and no more has been hung, as has the wrought iron chandelier. The deco fixtures in kitchen, bath, and dressing room, have all been polished and placed, just so. Julian has completed the decoupage of the vintage French postcards. We've only to buy a switch plate to top it off, silver and black toile from Anthropologie.

There have been gloriously long baths, with two, and sometimes three changes of water. Spiked with oils of myrrh, cypress, patchouli, and frankincense, Mr. Darcy perched nearby, Dimah on the bath rug that frightened her at first. There have been evenings of films, and documentaries, and book reading, and magazine perusing. Satie, Debussy, or Ravel swirling round, softly.

How I long for the storms of winter. How I yearn for an awe-inspiring season of El Niño, with floods of rain, landslides, devastating tides, disasters! But as of now, we're merely settling in, no high weather drama as of yet. We wait, we plot, we dream.

A vacation has been planned for Halloween weekend at the seaside, in the inn on the cliffs, across the river, where the waves break highest. There will be a drive into Mendocino, a visit to the hat shop, a new chapeau, perhaps. There will be a meal at St. Orr's of wild boar, or pleasant, maybe. There will be canoe trips up the river, into the haunted woods, quiet save for the hoots

Tk&A decorating your house in a way you could live with? Horrific! And *this*, this stereotypical, cluelessly ignorant “Goth” family is what the public sees, “Oh, so that’s what ‘Goth’ is. Hmmpf!”, they mutter, smug in their barcaloungers, a glass of Kool-Aid in one hand, a fist full of Chips-Ahoy in the other.

I can’t associate myself with these people any longer, these Munster types, and I don’t, really, but I’m inevitably lumped into this low-Goth category by some preppy suit talking behind my back. I wish they at least knew the difference between high and low, and knew enough to place me in the former.

§ **Wednesday, September 22, 2004.** I’ve just returned from the company bathroom where I found J— in white cotton socks and underwear, bent over, her back to me. “Oh!”, I cried. She grunted something unintelligible as I turned and fled. I suppose she is one of those nudist types, or former nudist types – she’s certainly the right age for the hippie hot-tub era. Or perhaps she frequents the gym so often that appearing undressed in front of anyone, co-workers included, seems reasonable to her. Me, I hate gyms for that very reason, the locker rooms full of indifferent women, lounging around in various states of undress, pendulous breasts, pumpkin-sized bellies, dense body hair parading up and down inner thighs, doughy bottoms on proud display. And this wouldn’t be *so very* bad, since I do turn my back to this spectacle, except that I sense their eyes upon me, sizing me up, looking me over, “What’s she got?”, coupled with some sort of multicultural *sista* bull-pucky vibe swirling thickly around the room, like we’re all supposed to be comfortable with our nudity and whatnot in the locker room – just like the guys. It is so, so undignified, and I will not subject myself to this sort of thing. How I loathe the public. How I especially loathe the *naked* public.

Lost two pounds.

§ **Thursday, September 23, 2004.** An all-day meeting today at a local restaurant. The same dull speakers, the same dull lunch, that infamous “catered” lunch, the same urns of stale coffee and baskets of Lipton tea at the back of the room.

For the first time I can sense that others are beginning to crack. Eleanor, who normally sits up close and nods enthusiastically in agreement to everything, has defected to the table at the back of the banquet hall. She sits next to me now, her stomach rumbling alarmingly, grinning that dopey grin of hers. Bill, on the other hand, has moved several tables forward to sit with Jeffrey, gung ho, *comme d’habitude*.

These all day meetings, twice a year, once excruciating, have become bearable – I spend my time writing letters, reading articles I’ve printed from the internet, (today, an interview with Stephen Fry which I later passed around to others interested in killing some time), and of course just writing, as I do now. Sherry Swan drones on at the head of the room. I can’t help but be reminded of grade school, trapped, wishing to flee. At lunch, sitting about the oval tables, sullenly eating our “catered” sandwiches,

“What’d you get?”

“Turkey. Wha’d *you* get?”

“Ham.”

“Trade ya.”

plot, moving from bed, to cubicle, to couch, and back to bed again. The monotony of summer, when I’m inspired by nothing, when I half-heartedly clutch at the ghosts of my muses. I’m languid and lumpy, bored with myself and my hobbies, marking time until the wind and the sunlight changes. When outdoors, I run from patch of shade, to patch of shade, in horror of the sunlight, a refuge of the dark months. I freckle and I turn a bit pink. I long the pallor and glamour of the winter equinox.

§ **Monday, September 13, 2004.** I’m on hold, endlessly it would seem, waiting to speak to a customer representative about my hospital bill. I’ve paid it in full, but am still receiving bills demanding payment. No doubt this is a clerical error which wastes not only my time, but theirs. How I loathe bureaucracy. How complicated our world has become. What tiresome technological aides. After all this, I’ve been shunted to a robot who’s asked me to leave a message, that they’ll “get back to me within one business day.” We shall see.

While it’s true that I don’t dress in outlandish Goth gear (I’m far too well-bred for that!) I do have a distinctly dark side. I’ve had it as long as I can remember. As a child I longed for long black hair, and to be named Christina – both seemed the epitome of mysterious sophistication. Later, I discovered the Addams Family, and was duly enchanted by Morticia, my first human influence (I use the qualification “human”, because I am less influenced by people than I am by places and ideas.) The Munsters were plebian, but the Addamses! Eccentric, rarified, educated, well-traveled, unconventional, aristocratic, yet loving, loyal to a fault, and strangely moral, though debauched. I think my love affair with decrepit mansions began then as well. How I marveled at their Victorian heap!

I grew up in Southern California, Laguna Beach to be exact. I was surrounded by beach culture, which I shunned, though I did own an black wool bathing suit from the 1920s which I donned for the odd beach party I was invited too. I’d huddle forlornly under a beach umbrella while the others snickered and blithely played at Frisbee and volleyball. A trip to Disneyland every Christmas Day was a rare treat from Mother, who doled out these respite from piano lessons, needlepoint, and bathroom tile scrubbing like a benevolent ogre, “Here is your reward, though you don’t deserve it. Now here is a dollar for your luncheon, see you don’t squander it.” I loved the Haunted Mansion, and would tour it over and over again, eyeing the decor, feeling quite comfortable among the faux Nouveau Orleans splendor, the velvet, the sconces, the gilt-edged mirrors, the flicker-flame bulbs, all so Interview With A Vampire, though I didn’t know it yet. Basking in spooky hallways, a computer generated storm raging “outside”, I’d taking copious mental notes on how I would decorate my own “haunted mansion” one day. Not much for a child to cling too, I realize, but in time I discovered the films of Hammer, and Roger Corman, which played frequently weekends on Seymour Presents. My little fringe friends and I, sleeping over at one another’s houses would stay up all night telling ghost stories, and watching Seymour. We all thought Sinister Seymour to be the last word in debonair. The other girls swooned for the doey-eyed, lobotomized boy from the sitcom *du jour*. “Isn’t he cute?!” they’d squeal? Well, no, I’d think to myself, but I’d smile and nod all the same, one must get along after all. Had they known how I adored Seymour, had they even known who he was (and I’m sure that they did not), how they would have laughed at me, “Eewww! He’s gross! You’re so weird Lucie!” I wondered what they saw in their bubble-gum blow-up boys, those bunnies, those puppies, just as I wonder now why women idealize men like Mel Gibson, Tom Cruise, Sean Connery, and Cary Grant. Give me Crispin Glover, Richard E. Grant, Jean-Pierre Léaud, or Vincent Price any day, anti-heroes

all, undeniably “weird”, but appealing all the same.

Thanks to *Smister Seymour*, *Hammer Films*, and Roger Cornman, I discovered Edgar Allan Poe at a very young age. I read the complete works at twelve, then moved on to Guy de Maupassant, bound up in the same leather and gilt edging, shelved to the left of Poe in Mother’s library. While decidedly less macabre, there was still that element of darkness, ruin, and debauchery. Absinthe soaked sons of ruined aristocratic families, prostitutes dressed in frills and flounces, their throats cut, eyes staring, dank cobblestoned alleys, a flickering candle in a window, decrepit family *hôtels particuliers*, abandoned save for the portraits of glibboline relatives whose eyes seemed to follow one about the room. I’m sure that Maupassant is what set me on the road to Paris; it sounded such a delightfully gloomy place! Paris, the city of light, but to me, it is dark, dark, dark, forever associated in my mind with starving artists living in windy garrets, aimless walks through medieval gardens, exotically painted women playing the barrel organ singing of sadness, narrow 19th century alleys and passageways, the rain, the sad beauty of the grey buildings and the greyer sky; the bloody meat, the cheeses and wines which smell of mold and caves, the catacombs, the women sitting alone in cafes, a *Chartrouse Verte* half finished before them, the anachronistic clothes one sees from time to time, in the shops, on certain people, like Mabillon, who we spied in the Metro late one afternoon, the inner left sleeve of his frill cuffed shirt stained with a small spot of blood, a copy of *Le Canard Enchaîné* under his left arm. He got off at Mabillon, and so we took to calling him that, Mabillon. Who was he? So thin, so pale, dressed like Baudelaire, that small spot of blood that had stained his sleeve in the crook of his arm.

I was later aware of a group of people calling themselves “Goth”. By this time, I was living on my own, wearing mostly black, as was my choice, growing my fingernails quite long and painting these black as well. But I wasn’t *all* doom and gloom. I had a penchant for vintage (and still do), especially that of the 1910s through the 1920s, and had decorated myself, and my home with articles from these eras. But there was a dark slant, very Theda Bara, very Sunset Boulevard, very “Goth”. I suppose, but I had never jumped myself in with this group; I hadn’t even known of their existence! True, I gravitated towards certain types of music, which is how this group defines itself particularly; one thinks of the Bauhaus and Joy Division, but in other respects, I’ve nothing in common with them. I love a stormy night, the flicker-flame bulbs lit on the wrought iron Beaux-Arts chandelier, the clype and frankincense candles glowing, alone, with nothing more than my love, my cats, a good book (Today it is Bobbed Hair and Bathub Gin), a tray of stilton & quince puffs and a bottle of good wine at hand. I do not like night-climbing, rubber clothing, piercings, or skull jewelry. I do like gothic architecture, sad music, disasters, films where everyone comes to a bad end, billous green walls, decayed elegance, 19th century doll body parts, 16th century herials, cabinets of curiosities, lichened, mossy graveyards, Paris Crime Album Stories, *Nosferatu* (starring Klaus Kinski), and *Dracula* (by Bram Stoker). This all has a very gothic ring to it, sure, but I also love the Decadent movement, the Dada-ists, the *fin-de-siècle*, bohemianism. Paris in the twenties, Edwardian England, Eric Satie, Maurice Ravel, Percy Grainger, the Ballets Russes, Charles Baudelaire, Emilie Zola, Anais Nin, Jean Rhys, and Henry Miller, none of which could be construed as purely “Goth”, or could they? To me, they all have a decidedly dark edge. I wear perfume made from cépes and tuberoses, and another named Absinthe. I still wear primarily black – it just feels right to me. I wear exotic jewelry, long chandelier earrings, strange Etruscan rings. My fall wardrobe purchases include puce lined, bile-green Moulin Rouge boots, dark and scary forest green suede cowboy boots, and a pink crocodile handbag with tortoise bachelite accents, but these aren’t “Goth”, are they? To me, I suppose they are.

C. has just rung to confirm that my hospital bill has been paid. I thanked her for her time. I feel very tall today. I have lost six pounds.

§ Wednesday, September 15, 2004. Julian and I sped off to the Clay after a demoralizing visit to the dentist, to lick our wounds and see *Bright Young Things*, the best film I’ve seen all summer; perfectly wonderful in every way. According to Penella Woolgar, who plays Agatha, it appears I *am* a bright young thing too. “How does one become a Bright Young Thing?” she’s asked. “Don’t care at all what anybody thinks of you. Set the fashion, don’t follow it. Never let the party end. You mustn’t be the last to leave either. Don’t let them leave either. When everyone else is knackered at 5 in the morning, swan off to go somewhere else. You can’t have a job, for starters. You can’t ever have school nights. Always have to be out and up for it, and be prepared to do everything more than once.”

I do have a general complaint about period piece films, and that is that no one seems able to get the music right, it’s always anachronistic, always. Now take *Bright Young Things* for example. Based on Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Vile Bodies*, published in 1930, the music should have strictly been 1920s, period. But what do we hear, blaring from the screen as soon as the film begins? Some bloody, buggy *big band* nonsense, and it doesn’t stop there, oh no. But the clothes were wonderful, as were the automobiles, as were the interiors. Why, oh why can’t these film makers get the music right? It makes no sense.

I’ve lost two more pounds.

§ Monday, September 20, 2004. Woke up feeling a bit under the weather. I feel sure I must have one of those mysterious fall allergies; allergic to falling leaves or some such. Ironically, I adore the fall, and so have the idea that I could be allergic to *it*. I spent the day lounging about, without the least of qualms, flipping channels – now Matt and Shari for laughs coupled with horror, now “On a tout essayé” for a casual French lesson, and finally TCM for some film noir and nostalgia. Later, after a two hour long bath, Julian and I settled down to watch “Renovate My Family”.

The Cole-Reimer family. How can I describe them? Perfectly charming, but overly *Munsterish*, if you know what I mean – coffins in the living room, and other assorted spooky bric-a-brac that might appeal to an eight-year-old, what Julian and I call *low*-Goth. Let’s take a small aside and delineate exactly what I mean by *low* and *high* Goth:

So, anyway, here were these Cole-Reimers, Goth mom and dad and their three children: the eldest, a fed-up, “normal” daughter, the youngest, a non-descript boy who seemed obsessed with video games, and the middle, a willowy poetic looking girl with Goth tendencies.

The Cole-Reimers. I wasn’t so much appalled by their “look”, or their home decor (save the plastic orange Halloween pumpkins), as I was that they would agree, scratch that, rather *seek* to turn their lives over to complete strangers, one of whom was bloody, buggy. Dr. Phil’s son, Jay McGraw! Too, too sick-making! The Oprah connection should have been enough to scare these people off, but to add to the conflagration, there was entirely *too much* talk of a “normal” house, and “normal” lives. It was utterly putrid. What sort of self-respecting person would submit to this sort of pop psychology make-over, *especially*, one who has chosen to live his life on the outside? And who would *want* to be on television? Can you just *imagine* identical blond triplet

Father is one who many would envy me, he isn't what I should have liked for myself, not exactly. I love his weirdness, his bohemian living, his genius, his talent, his living outside the confines of middle-class life, but I do wish that he had had the bravery, the guts and the courage to stay with me, to be a Father when I needed him most, to be the voice of reason when my Mother had none.

And now, here he is. He writes twice a year to tell me he is well, that his wife is well. That life is just as it was 6 months ago. It is exceedingly superficial, and I blame myself. Were I more serious, were I a scientist, a historian, a concert pianist, I would surely find more favor in his eyes. Instead, I am merely me, a funny little thing with a talent for nothing, who writes and paints, and daydreams altogether too much. A woman who could be said to be profoundly immature, to have an arrested development, to be revilingly self-centered and ridiculous. A person who lives in a dream world, a fantasy. A freak.

"We accept her one of us!"

I think of the film "The Dreamers", and I am comforted somewhat, but these were children. These were adolescents with time on their side. Would these same characters, living out this same sort of life so indulgently to the exclusion of reality, wouldn't it be pathetic in people of my age? To live in an exquisite, luxurious prison, thinking nothing of film, literature, and half-baked ideas, shutting out the world, anyone or anything that would interfere with the fantasy? Is this reasonable?

We were described as a "hot house flowers" by one of my internet friends. He says he worries about us, Julian and me. He senses that a crack-up would be in order, should we be faced with the outside world in more than a peripheral way. I sometimes wonder what would happen should I be laid off from the office, should I be forced to find another job, one where I might have to interact with the public, 40 hours a week. What would become of me? Would I perish? Or would I discover some hidden reserves deep within, something which would inspire me, to appreciate life with renewed vigor?

§ November 25, 2004. I received electronic courier from so many internet friends today! I was thrilled to receive it, but at the same time, I put it away to read another time. And earlier this week a letter from Father, who writes maybe twice a year. I put the letter aside for Julian to read to me. I can't touch it. I can't read it. And I am the same way about any other correspondence I receive. But it's not that I'm not happy to get it. I check my email accounts frequently each day, looking for a message from Danny, from Gail, from Michelle, from Rebecca, from Ken, or Neal. And yet, once they have written me, I am cautious, terrified, worried, nervous at what I will actually find.

I think of my past relationships, friendships, the rejections by Mother, Father, and later my Brother. I am *afraid* of intimacy. I am *afraid* of abandonment. I think of my recent musings over friendship and my lack of them, and I consider my own fears and how they could interfere with any possible intimacy. Isn't it easier to end a friendship before it begins rather than risk hurt? And don't I play the passive role? Forcing people to come to me, pursue me, I test them to be sure that their feelings are genuine, to be sure that their intent is honorable. It is no wonder I have so few friends.

On the train, walking the streets, everywhere observing people, I look into their faces and see only maleficence: mean mouths, cruel eyes, putty-like faces, noses broken and bulbous, pockets concealing handguns or box cutters. I fear everyone. Everyone, potentially, would do me harm...if

I've begun to read *Status Anxiety* by Alain de Botton.

§ October 13, 2004. I've already finished *Status Anxiety*, which was full of perfect quotes, some from Voltaire, most from Schopenhauer, concerning such topics as the stupidity of the masses, and so forth. All this geared me up for today's inevitable commute where I encountered not one, but two horribly morbidly obese men, a homunculus with a chronic snort/sniff, and a mannish woman with a baby pink Pashmina shawl thrown like a bangle over her shoulder. The aviation man who chuckles loudly over comics and slaps his knee every morning on the shuttle bus had returned, following his surgery, which he had loudly discussed with our bus driver several weeks ago. "Thin people have heart attacks too," he'd said, then lovingly stroked his belly before returning to fannies. "See you in the funny papers," I should say, the next time he departs at stop two.

The sun was magnified orange fuzz, low in a smoke filled sky. I was sleepy, I was resigned, I plotted my plans for the day: email to Jamie (to politely thank him for his inquiry about my health), Carmella (to drop off the microwave), and Kenneth (to confirm dinner *chez nous* Friday night).

I get off the bus at stop four and shuffle my way to the office. My cubicle, my rubber plant, my pictures of Julian in Paris are all where I left them. I lay my book down carefully on the desk at my side to remind me there *is* life (today it is Anaïs Nin's *Incest : from a journal of love*). I turn on my computer then get a cup of green jasmine tea. I check my email, then connect to internet radio. This done, I'm ready to begin my day's briefing - has there been a disaster? I check the online paper. Anything newsworthy? Alas, no. And then, finally, with nothing left to stall with, it's to work.

At noon, I drink a little soup, maybe look for new titles on Amazon, or see what's new at Anthropologie. I look for new entries in friend's journals - alas, they're busy with other projects, it seems. Maybe I'll look for online articles about recent film discoveries, or people I'm interested in - why is there practically nothing written about Madeleine Castaing, I wonder?

Then, back to work, looking at the clock, arguing with difficult colleagues (in the nicest possible way, of course), avoiding the shrill denizens from the cubicles across the way - why are these women always in the bathroom (and carrying on conversations with one-another while on the toilet?), or hanging around in the lunchroom ostensibly making coffee? Mr. Parent finally leaves, then Marion, then Jeffrey, and finally me.

I walk to the bus stop, admire the Poplar trees (who still carry their leaves), the Sycamores (who don't), and the Maples (who are just beginning to turn an orangey Chinese red, a Cherokee red. At the bus stop I avoid the glances of the elderly Latin American man, who tried terribly hard to chat me up one afternoon, "You are so be-en-tee-ful," he said, "So pale. Will you come dancing with me?" "But what of your wife, at home in El Salvador," I asked, smiling, mocking him slightly. "Oh. My wife..." his voice trailed off.

Now, after disappointing him, we no longer talk. But this is for the best. I leave work, and I immediately want to draw back into my own thoughts, my own drama, my own fantasies, the film of my life, a new reel having just begun, inscribing itself as it plays. I need to get away from people, from other agendas, from anyone and anything else's reality. It is now all about me.

When I reach the train station I carefully cross the tracks, thinking of the dead I've seen as

a passenger through rain-streaked windows, or on brilliantly sunny, nonchalant mornings - a shoe there, a lump under a grey nylon sheet over there. One minute all is breezy and innocuous and full of plans for the future, the next is nothingness. I wait on the platform, near the man with the hat and the handlebar mustache. I imagine what books he must read, Goethe, Camus, Michener? But the express arrives, and the board boards. I follow them on, refusing to be part of the shoving and glaring match of dominance; let them have their fun, but I'll not be a part of it. I sit, in a spot that no one ever takes, in a corner, there is no window, the sun does not glare, and I am left alone. I read and mull *things* over.

Julian waits for me at the end of the line and we walk home together, stopping at the market to buy steaks, or spinach, or whatever it is we need for that evening's dinner. Julian tells me about his day, about his latest ideas for his novel, he keeps me in fine company. He might suggest Sushi, or a movie, or perhaps we'll go home to the kitties, Mr. Darcy and Little Miss Dinah Moppett.

I've lost four pounds.

§ October 16, 2004. The morning has abruptly begun with drawing school. How I loathe drawing school. At present, Rosemary and Barbara talk about Jackson Pollock, "How you seen the film *Pollock*", one asks, "You really should, it will give you a whole new perspective on him - he *meant* to paint like that - it wasn't an accident!" Time for slides, Sara has handed out a packet of Xeroxed pages to read. *Quelle horreur*. Jesus. There's even a glossary.

Kenneth and Philippe came for dinner last night. I made a meal of spinach salad, steaks with a mustard port wine sauce, oven-roasted potatoes, and minato for dessert. We had a good time, if not a bit sedate; I opened the bottle of Chimon wine, but after they'd left, I felt so depressed, and I'd quite forgotten that my, this drawing class would begin in hours. How I dread this class! This morning I begged Julian to stay, like a kindergarten who reluctantly leaves his mother for the first day of school. It is so difficult for me to take this sort of intellectual approach to art, especially towards drawing, which for me is merely a tool, a craft that one needs in order to accomplish greater things. I only am interested in technique, and not artistry when it comes to drawing. I am a painter, and not a drawer. To add to this, Sara is a woman who admires contemporary art and artists above all. Her tastes, her curriculum reflect this, and it is so very unhelpful to me, someone who is more interested in traditional forms and ideas. I can say that there is nothing I love which was done past 1950; I do not like contemporary art.

Today's project looks awful. As examples, she is showing Jasper Johns drawings, shapes, positive and negative spaces. It's all so, so dull, being made to do art which feels utterly unnatural to do. Sara is surrounded by her synophant admirers, Barbara, Rosemary, and Rommie. They all raise their hands, eager to answer Sara's rhetorical questions, fetch and carry, so jolly, so enthusiastic, I suppose they really do enjoy this class. Good for them - how I wish I could feel as they do.

Sara now explains to us what symmetrical and unsymmetrical mean. Good grief. It's only 10:40 and I leave at 1:00. Sara just wants to talk. I've decided. She just wants to lecture. She likes to be *in charge*. She is uncomfortable with individualists, i.e., me.

Later:

After my wretched drawing class this morning, Julian and I drove out to Celia's for a lunch which would make up for my unhappy morning and sate Julian's appetite for old-fashioned, family-

We dined very well, then walked the few blocks to the theatre where "Welcome to the Hyndrom" was being staged. We approached the building, where not a soul was to be seen, and entered through a dark little passageway at back. There were dimly-lit red velvet curtains, taxi-derry, and the sound of a pump-organ playing the most beautiful, spooky music I've heard. We were told to wait, I imagined the theatre empty, the organ music being played as part of rehearsal. I'd no idea that we'd stumbled in on the overture, that the theatre was filled, that we were the last to take our seats.

Presently, the music stopped, a pale, gaunt woman ran by us, dressed in what looked like a white wedding gown, a bit down at the heels, calling to mind Elsa Lanchester's great role as the bride of Frankenstein. We were shown to our seats, and the show began.

These three vignettes we were shown, were originally staged in Paris, in the tradition of the theatre of the Grand Guignol. It was cheesy, campy, weird, historical, the costumes were lovely, and the grand finale was quite frightening indeed. I hope that the Thrillpeddlers will keep up their good works, bringing the darkness back to San Francisco.

And San Francisco used to be so dark: Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, a port town, next stop Shanghai, the dark alleys of China Town, opium dens, the Barbary Coast, fallen women, Anton La Vey. We still have the fog, and it was blowing in thick that evening, there was a fog "advisory". And so after leaving the theatre, and saying our goodbyes, Julian and I drove out to Fort Point, to listen to the fog horn at the Golden Gate Bridge, watch the empty windows of the old Presidio, and toast our 10th wedding anniversary, which arrived at midnight.

§ November 20, 2004. Yesterday was the 10th anniversary of our wedding, Julian and me. We celebrated by buying a lemon cake and a fair bottle of champagne. We watch Shanghai Express and Joyless Street. We played scrabble and listen to King Oliver. Later, we experimented with absinthe and living theatre. Today, tired, feeling a little seedy, we watch Alice and Diary of a Lost Girl. We wish Johnny's would reopen, but instead resign ourselves to Indian.

The air has cleared. It is insufferably sunny. We keep the drapes pulled and pout about the weather. How deliciously deary it had been last week. One could easily imagine one was in Prague, Bruxelles, Krakow, Budapest, so damp and dark it had been, the low lying haze obscuring the sunshine, the evenings a satisfying mélange of orange and grey-blue smokeky skies. And with the sun, the temperature rises a little. No longer do I need my velvet slippers, yet I wear them, persisting in my dreams of a gloomy autumn by the fire, sipping hot tea, reading Strindberg, and stroking Mr. Darcy, who cuddles by my side, no matter the weather.

I'm shocked to discover that it is the Thanksgiving holiday next week. I had thought it was at least two weeks hence. It is not that I think about Thanksgiving, rather, I am unhappy that the autumn has flown by as quickly as it has. Not yesterday, it seemed, we had only turned into September. Soon it will be Xmas, and with it, a trip to see my family in Laguna Beach, the post-holiday blues, and the oldtrums of January, the dullest month of the year.

A letter from Father arrived. I put it aside for Julian to open and read to me. I somehow cannot bring myself to open and read his letters. If it were up to me, there would be a stack of them on the mantle, gathering dust. I do not know why I should react so. My feelings for my Father are, of course, complicated. He left Mother, and me, when I was six, to disappear, leaving only memories, and a fairy tale which each year grew in stature, glamour, and complexity. In a way, it is easier to live with the legend that one has spun, than to accept the reality. And while my

isn't that the ultimate sign that there is something very, very wrong? That one only has oneself to blame?

Carmella ruins her friendships (most of them), she drives people away. She feels undeserving, and so makes a face when given a fine birthday present, not knowing what to do, how to deal with her emotions. She believes she's a mess, she believes she is flawed, she believes she's imperfect, and so she chooses men who are even more messed-up and flawed and imperfect than she. She loves to help them, to rescue them, because she herself wishes that someone would help and rescue her. I know these things, for I used to be exactly as she is.

I feel vaguely guilty for my recent tirade concerning Carmella. But I also know that no one can be perfect (as I've acknowledged with Carmella), including myself. Clearly everyone has personality flaws; no one is perfect. To demand perfection from ones friends would mean that one would never have friends. I still have much to learn about friendship, I do, me, who has spent much time deriding others in this journal, rejecting my so-called friends only to take up with them again once I've had a more encouraging encounter with them. When will I learn to accept other's flaws? To realize that no one can be everything, that everyone has a bad day, that to be "on" all the time, is an impossibility? Instead, I should express my anger, or my disappointment, but acquiesce that these are aberrative moments, not symptoms of something more sinister.

Clearly, I'm a narcissist who is focused only on herself, her feelings, what any one relationship means to her and her investment in it. I have never understood the dynamics of friendship clearly, at least, this is what I surmise, having lost all friends to time, letting them drop when they've outlived their usefulness, or their capability for inducing jollity. I've no childhood friends. My oldest friend, Carmella, I've known only for thirteen years, we spent thinking we were no longer friends with one-another. It was less than two years ago that she contacted me suddenly, wanting to renew our friendship.

But I see the other sides of things. How pathetic, I've often thought, that someone would still be friends with the children they grew up with. Haven't they changed? Isn't it true that our friends don't always change as we do, and so this is why they fall by the wayside? Is there anything wrong with this, really? Would it have benefited me (There, I've used the word "benefit", quite unconsciously!), to have maintained my friendship with Karen? The girl who turned born-again Christian in seventh grade as I sought out rock bands who flirted with devilry and all things dark? And what of Julia, who dropped out of high-school to join a rag-tag bunch of dead-heads? I'll admit, I was momentarily intrigued by the skull imagery - until I heard the music. People change. Or rather, I changed. I'm always changing. Or perhaps I'd not found the kinds of friends who were, at their core, as I still am.

8 November 19, 2004. Last night was a beautiful dream, one of those evenings where everything is as perfect as it could be. We met, Julian, Kenneth, Philippe, Chimes, and me, at the Schnitzlehaus at 6:30. Chimes was beautifully dressed in a long, black leather coat, a snappy vest with pocket watch, and *slacks*. I was amazed at his transformation from scruffy computer guy, to handsome dimer date. Kenneth and Philippe, who'd just come from work were a bit harried, but happy to let the evening begin. Kenneth was starving, and a bit querulous, still, about the election, ranting about buying guns, about his mother (who'd voted for Bush, of course), and the Christian right. It's all so bloody obvious. "Yes, Kenneth, we know Kenneth, why are you surprised Kenneth?" Ultimately, that is why we all live in San Francisco, isn't it Kenneth?

style Mexican food. Alas, when we reached Celia's, we found it shut up and dark, not to open for another hour and a half. As it was nearly two, and we were starved, having not broken our fasts since dinner the night before, we thought a drive out near the mall might offer up some sort of Mexican solution - it would be Mexican or nothing. But the thin, grey houses of the Outer Sunset rolled by, with no restaurants in sight, no diners, nothing that seemed suitable. When we arrived at the mall, I could see a Chevy's, and knowing they serve Mexican food, I felt positive. Julian, on the other hand felt dubious, but was hungry enough to acquiesce to my weak and hungry pleas.

It was a mistake. A big mistake. It was rotten and horrible and awful in every way. I should have known better, and Julian warned me, but I was optimistic with my weird idea that all restaurants should be fine and good and nice, spoiled as I am by Da Flora, Bistrot E Europe and our other favorite San Francisco restaurants. And no doubt I was probably delirious from hunger, forgetful of danger. Julian went to park the car while I hobbled into the restaurant. I was greeted by a surly waiter with whom I had to argue to get a booth - a very nice beginning indeed. The *paper* napkin was wrapped tightly about the silverware, the mess secured with tape - I was horrified that a *restaurant* should present their table settings as such. The waitress was perky, overly friendly, bloody revolting with her, "Hi! I'm Jennifer and I'll be your waitress today?" - I add the question mark to illustrate her bizarre diction of the phrase, a turned up end to the sentence which would otherwise indicate that a question had been asked. "Can I get you anything to get you started? [Get me started? Like a car?]" Something from the bar?" I glared straight ahead and said that "I would like to wait until my friend arrives." "Can I get you something from the bar?" "I would like to wait until my friend arrives." I repeated. She stalked off, clearly unhappy that I wouldn't play the game, say the pat answers.

Julian arrived. He advised me that we were deep in enemy territory and that I should let him do all the talking. "We're observing them in their own habitat," he said. I noticed that Jennifer had been replaced by the manager on duty, perhaps sensing that we were outsiders, trouble, unfamiliar with the language. "Hi guys! Can I get you something to get you started?" Us guys. In case he hadn't noticed, I am *not* at all a *guy*. How I hate this faux-intimate, "Hey we're all friends here!" speak. I am not his friend, I am not a guy, and I don't want to be patronized by a waiter. I want there to be D.I.S.T.A.N.C.E and F.O.R.M.A.L.I.T.Y., thank you very much. I looked away. The Asian family at the next table studied their menus, looking perplexed. I ordered the most innocuous hunch I could find, shrimp fajitas.

Mimmes later, my shrimp fajitas came on a huge sizzling platter the size of a small dining table, with smaller dining tables jutting out from the sides on which there were heaping piles of Mexican condiments and starches. I shrunk back visibly in horror, "Don't worry! It won't hurt you unless you want it to! Heh heh!", said the manager. But there it sat, audibly sizzling on a metal platter, how was I to negotiate this buffet table placed before me? It was obscene and ridiculous all at the same time.

I shoved the sizzling platter spaceship away from me with my torn and rumpled paper napkin. Julian made a face and said his food tasted like a reheated T.V. dinner. It was appalling. And I knew that if the manager, or anyone, stopped by to ask us how everything was, I would repeat what Julian said to me, "Do you *really* want to know? It tastes like a reheated T.V. dinner." But no one ever asked. We were avoided and ignored. I guess we look weird, act weird, and so are treated as such. Who wouldn't like a jumbo platter of sizzling shrimp fajitas with all the fixin's? Are you nuts or somethin'? Freak! Get outta my franchise and don't come back!

I'd never thought we were so very odd, but after this gruesome lunch which took away our life force, we went into the mall, to sit in the atrium and watch the people, and I knew that we did look weird, that we do seem different, even without meaning to be. They, them, they all seemed so very dull and ordinary, though Julian observed that there were more piercings to be seen than on Haight street - "alternative" "culture" filters down to the masses. It was eye-opening, like a trip to another country, and it certainly made me appreciate my life, the distance between the *them* of this world and me. I should like to go back to the mall, to observe how normal people behave, dress, eat, talk, all of it - their culture. But next time, I think a trip out of town is in order, Sacramento perhaps, or maybe farther a field. How I would love to observe the wildlife at the Mall of America!

Lying in San Francisco, one gets used to well dressed, cultured people, interesting people, people who are artistic, creative, eccentric. But this isn't how most people are, and I long for people to be even more strange and unique and exotic. And yet, what does a person's outward appearance really have to do with *who* they are? Julian would say everything. I would tend to say everything, but I would like to believe that in most cases it has nothing to do with it. That there are people who go about *incognito* not wanting to draw attention to themselves, but inside of them lies a firestorm of interest! Still, I do wish people would try to *look* a little more interesting, if only for aesthetic reasons, because it makes the world a more interesting place to live, more beautiful, more artful, more expressive, more dreamlike. The mundane is like death to me.

§ October 20, 2004. This morning on the shuttle yet another homunculus. This one an Asian man (short and squat goes without saying when describing a homunculus) with a big ol' Slim Jim Beef Stick protruding from the front pocket of his pants. He carried an umbrella whose bottom had been lost during some long-ago fracas. Empty spider egg pods peeked out from between the folds of the umbrella fabric. Relieved he wasn't sitting next to me, I turned to the drab morning commute outside the bus windows.

King Parouk died in 1895 while trying to guzzle two bottles of champagne in one draft.

I've lost three more pounds.

§ October 21, 2004. I'm waiting in Chow on Church street for Julian to return from parking the car. Chimes, Schippers and Bill are to meet us at 7:00 for a last dinner date before Schippers and Bill move to Saint Petersburg, Saint Pete, as they call it. The crowd here is very attractive, sleek, well-dressed in that San Francisco sort of way, which means understated elegance at *beaucoup* de dollars. Think Armani, but casual, and you'll understand. Most are gay men in couples, or lesbians, women whom before I knew better I would never imagine to be gay. (I'm afraid that my gay stereotypes where women are concerned lingered far too long, and my gaydar when it comes to women, is horribly insufficient. But this is all neither here nor there, is it?) Everyone in pants, not a skirt in sight save for me, I feel out of my element, with this hip San Francisco crowd. I too am hip, but of course! But not at all in the same way. I am like no one here, I do not understand the trends and the signals. I am, once again, visiting a foreign country. I try to look inconspicuous, to blend in as I write in my journal.

I order a glass of pinot noir from a friendly lesbian behind the bar, one who seems motherly and kind, and I almost, for a minute, can understand why, what, could be attractive about another woman - a mother replacement? A mother figure for one whose mother was cold and set herself

§ November 15, 2004. Julian left for a conference in Monterey yesterday evening. I will be alone for three days. I imagine myself taking advantage of the time alone, writing, walking, doing those things I've normally no time for. My routine today hasn't changed at all. I awoke late, made myself a bowl of soup and some tea, ate two Clementines, sat down at the computer and worked. There is much work to be done at this time of year, and it is that time of year when I least feel like working. Instead, I'd like to stay abed, cozy, with a book and a cup of hot tea, or laugh in the tub, listening to the music Leszek Janowski composed for the films of the Brothers Quay. But I'm worried about work. Our company all but admits that it has hit difficult times (Our Christmas party was cancelled in favour of a luncheon buffet at the office.) I fear that once we've moved beyond the present crisis, there may be layoffs, though this could take another year. I would be the first to go - I was the last who was hired. To appease myself, I contemplate what my severance package might be, if anything. At least there would be State unemployment benefits. At least for a little while.

Mr. Darcy sits in on the little chair in the kitchen, the one with the petit-point pillow, and cries. He misses Julian. I try to reason with him, to distract him, but nothing really works. In the end, he settles down on the back of the couch, near me, resigned to life for the next few days without Julian. Meanwhile, Dinah pesters me with her toy, wanting constant attention, but refusing to sit in my lap. What she needs is a real, live mouse. I would find one for her, but am arrested by the thought of blood and gore on the carpet or on my bed, where she'd no doubt bring the poor creature as a prize for her mother.

My clothes from Anthropologie came today!

I can fit in them all, well, *presque*. I must keep up my good work so I can wear my beautiful new clothes in the next few weeks.

Later I'll have a small meal of cold, leftover meatloaf and two Clementines, Clementines which remind me of our early, snowy mornings in Paris on the rue du Four, drinking black tea and watching the *Météo*. There is nowhere I'd rather be, but with Julian, waking up to the rumbling of the Metro.

§ November 18, 2004. All is as it should be. Carmella called and we spoke for over an hour. It felt good, and it felt right. I must learn to let her take the initiative; when she calls *me*, she is ready to talk. She feels like it. If I call her, it may, or may not work out; she feels interrupted, like I've impinged on her world. Of course she likes me, she loves me. And I love her as well. My oldest friend, I should stay supportive, and refrain from being so judgmental. The fact is, she is lightly touched by mental illness, most of which I blame on her mother, who was a truly horrible woman. It is true, she is an adult, that she should be able to adapt and get over these things, but easier said than done.

The pills, the quack doctors, the astrologers, the acupuncturists, all this is driven by her knowledge, both conscious and subconscious, that she needs help, she seeks help, she wants help. She wants to be whole, to be fixed, to be happy. There is a big empty spot inside her: she is constantly searching for love, for validation (hence, the need to "be somebody?"); for acceptance. Rejected by her mother, who withheld her love, she feels unlovable, flawed. She is filled with a self-loathing and self-doubt, that she is unworthy of love, of happiness. For if she were, wouldn't her mother have loved her? Isn't that what mothers do? And if one's mother doesn't love one,

§ **November 12, 2004.** Carnella has written. She is not at all angry that we have cancelled. She admits that she was going to charge this meal to her credit card, and Guy, who is also unemployed... Well, we would have paid for his meal between the three of us. She leaves it up to Guy, whatever he wants to do. I hope he will accept my invitation to come here for dinner. I even offered to bake him a cake.

Later:

Guy has written me to ask if we would consider eating at a much less expensive restaurant, and I have accepted. I left it up to him, and to Carnella to choose a place, I hope they choose wisely. I am happy with this compromise. On our afternoon walk, Julian points out that I have been the voice of reason.

The dolls have come in the mail! My Voodoo Lily and Guillotina from October Effigies!

They look even better in person than they do here, in these pictures from the October Effigies website. They are amazing, and beautiful, and perfect in every way. How I love them. How I wish I could have them all! How I wish I could house them in a Victorian chapel hothouse.

§ **November 13, 2004.** Drawing class seems to be getting better. Despite my efforts to the contrary, I am warming up to Sara, who has tried her hardest (and won!) to charm me. We talked at some length about the hatred artists have for their own work, their own tough, unrelenting judgment which forever dooms them to find fault with their work. Will I ever like anything that I do? She's encouraged me to bring in one of my paintings, so that she may offer advice. Though I tremble at the thought of anyone seeing my work, especially the women in this class (But why? *Who are they?*), I reluctantly agree. As Sara says, maybe she can help. I need to put aside my fear of rejection, my fears of criticism, so that I may benefit from her experience and education. After she's lulled me into sharing, I see her turn to Edward and ask him to do the same thing. What's this to be? A group review of our outside endeavors?

Again, first thing this morning, we were to submit last week's work for discussion. There were the usual banal remarks and rambling lecture from Sara about value, light and dark, and how we had each achieved it. It was easy to see from our work who is merely following orders (chubby, good-natured, denim-clad Ronnie), who rebel's to make the project their own (little ol' me), who has the most promise as a technically proficient artist (the beautiful child Edward) and who is mentally ill (slatternly Rosemary, weary from working the night-shift at the hospital).

I'm stunned and confused by Rosemary, who's drawings are *always* nothing but fields of black, no matter what the assignment, no matter what the subject matter. Nothing but layers of compressed charcoal which she annotates with her gum eraser. She arrives looking simply disheveled, but leaves with black detritus smeared from elbow to nose. Later that morning I notice that Rosemary has approached that day's assignment of cross-hatching and line value by coating her paper in soft charcoal. At the centre of this mullity, a field of fat parallel lines rubbed through by the gum eraser break up the monotony.

I was to call Carnella today after class, but I couldn't muster up the courage. Though she's not unhappy that I've cancelled our expensive plans, I still fear her and her censor. I will call her, but let several days pass before I do. Aloofness, a little distance, works well in keeping her favorably disposed towards me.

apart, always? Julian appears next to me before I have time to ponder this question any more. I guzzle my glass of pinot noir in one draft, and set off with Julian to the bar next door to search for Chineses.

Later:

Dinner was a chore, and a bore, if I may be so dumb, and it is dumb, but these words accurately express my feelings about the whole ordeal. Oh, and it was money *not* well spent, since we have so little of it these days. The food was meagre and the restaurant, Chow, was loud, too loud for my taste. Like a roadhouse without the piano and liquored-up traveling salesmen. We listened to Schippers and Bill worry out loud about packing and driving across country, about their new house, its many new features, like granite countertops and stainless appliances in the kitchen. Florida just seems so very dull, so limiting, and the weather too hot (though I would love the thunderstorms.) Julian and I smiled, and asked questions, and we hugged and kissed our friends goodbye later out front under the awning of a bead store, promising to visit them, someday.

§ **10/23/04.** Drawing school, again. Every Saturday morning it comes, whether I want it to, or not. We begin with a critique of our work. Critique, damaging at worst, and useless at best. How useful is it to discuss and analyze work in a beginning drawing class? It seems utterly futile to me. Now here we are, discussing our work, explaining it. When it comes to my turn, I'll have nothing to say, I'll not want to say a word. I am not at all happy with my artwork, and the idea of a critique just reinforces my feelings of inferiority. I spent the better part of yesterday evening ranting about my horrible paintings and drawings, insisting that I have no talent, that I should quit, while Julian did his best to bolster my courage. "But you *do* have talent. It takes more than what you've done thus far to be good. You don't think anyone just blasted out masterpieces when he first took up art?!" Of course he's right, but if only I could see some sign of talent, some sign of genius, it would encourage me to go on. But I wonder, does one ever like his own work? Won't I always hate my own work? And yet, I don't hate my own writing. In fact, I tend to think it better than it actually is. And so it goes to some extent with this class; although I hate my work, I still feel superior, aloof, better than everyone. Yes, it is true, my work is so much different than the others, who seem to follow directions and nothing more. I do not follow Sara's directives exactly; this I suppose is "bad" of me, but isn't it also very good? All this that I've written just now, how typical of me, wild mood swings between unconfident self-loathing and egotistical superiority. What would a psychiatrist say?

Ronnie, Rosemary (who pronounces drawing "drraring"), and Barbara: blah, blah, blah, "This drraring really expresses the values between dark and light." Blah, blah, blah. And then Sara turns to me, and my exercise on positive and negative space, and there is a positive reaction from everyone, "So daring!" "So unique!" "So creative!" "Lucie really takes the assignment and does so much more with it than expected." I'm shocked, partially because, as I've explained, I loathe my own work with a passion, and partially because I assumed that my classmates all hated me (how could they not?), sitting at the back of the room as I do, glowering through my black hair like the Ally Sheedy character in *The Breakfast Club*. To me, my work seems juvenile and undeveloped. And so do I...

Oh! I still loathe all this, good critique or not, and it occurs to me that perhaps they were only being charitable, since I must seem rather dysfunctional and weird. It gives one false hope, sand castles for a second, then more self-loathing when one thinks that the compliments were

generated by pity or in the name of community good cheer. I should have liked better to have been criticized soundly, at least then I would believe the compliments should they ever be forthcoming. How I hate false kindness, which isn't kind at all. But then, wasn't this exactly what I was guilty of Thursday night? Chatting amiably with Schippers, Bill, and Chimes, all the while thinking to myself, "Good God, when will this evening be over?" Aren't we all guilty of these lies in the name social ease? I dare say, if I avoided everyone who annoyed or bored me, I would be limited to the friendship of Julian, Guy & Carmella, and several internet friends I've lovingly cultivated (how I wish they lived here!) Like Anais Nin, I want to *choose* my friends, not seize them by happenstance: co-workers, schoolmates, neighbours, and so forth.

I hear Ronnie, Rosemary, Barbara, and Sara laugh at the *notion* of misery and art. Sara says, "A professor of mine always said that we did our best work when we were unhappy. I didn't want to hear *that!* Don't tell me *that!*" They all laugh at the ludicrous idea that miserable artists produce great art. The very idea! Looking at everyone's work, sitting here, listening to everyone's dumb comments, I can't help but think what a lot of crappy artists we *all* are. They're all so damned positive, "I think everyone's drawings are so good! Everyone did such a *fantastic* job!" I sigh and turn back to my notebook. How cynical and negative I am, miserable, but strangely happy, joyous in my isolation.

I can hear the rain on the roof. How I love it here at the Art Institute, the Spanish Revival buildings, the bell tower, the courtyard and Moorish fountain. I desperately wish Jason were teaching this drawing class, that it were held evenings, instead of these ungodly Saturday *matins*. I wish I were better at drawing, at this, my journal writing, that I had a better attitude towards all of it. Will I ever like my own work? And if I never do like my own work, does that mean I'm a bad artist?

Sara has set up the slide projector, and a slide housing has been passed to each one of us. We're to use them as "viewfinders". Viewfinders??? And today's project is? To draw paper bags. Joy. My most hated drawing assignment, and the one which drove me to quit drawing classes years ago. I turn away from the bags and the viewfinders. I instead turn my thoughts toward our Halloween coastal vacation in Guadalupe next weekend. It keeps me going during times such as this, when one is forced to draw paper bags with a classroom of middle-aged budding artists. I can see them years from now, crowding up street fairs with their landscapes and still-lives. And next week will we discuss our paper bag drawings? But I will be away in the bracken and gorse, watching the waves, listening to the cypresses, far away from these happy crores.

My new Anais shoes don't fit correctly. They are too small. I broke my toes the day I bought them, and put them on for the first time last night. How did this happen? They fit in the shop. And I've had them soled. I don't know that I'll be able to exchange them! After class, Julian and I will go back to Paolo to try and exchange my shoes. But will it work?

§ October 25, 2004. I'm on the train. Above me, sit two Mexican men, "Hola baybee", they say, with a wink and a leer. It's always the same with them. At what point do they give up? As a young girl they would turn from the trucks on their way to the fields, whistling, yelling in Spanish, and making obscene gestures. Now, as a woman, a married woman, I still get the treatment. Should I be flattered? Or annoyed with myself for being flattered? And at what point will this attention end? And when it does, will I take it as some sort of fatal sign that my youth, my beauty have passed so much so that even the Mexican day labourers fail to respond?

She is difficult, she is demanding, and she is unsympathetic. The relationship, in so many ways, is all one sided. I listen to her problems, I hear about the drama she creates with her other friends, I lend a sympathetic ear and try to be helpful, considerate, comforting. And she loves me for these qualities. "Luce, you are so *nice*", she says, or, "Luce, you are so jolly!" this, because I often laugh at her stories, at her difficulties, at the problems she creates for herself. Poor Carmella whose only wish is to be famous, to be admired by her contemporaries, to be somebody in the world of literature; she tortures herself, and wastes her life. When all is said and done, when she's dead, who will know, who will care that she's published or not? I dare say, no one. And in the meantime, she's put her life aside, she's unable to just *live*, always worried about impressing others, attending the right art openings, patronizing the right people who may (or may not) help her. Her art is a chore, a task that she's driven to perform by a need to succeed, to "be somebody." The process of making art, of writing, doesn't interest her at all, only the payoff. It's a job, and she wants her just rewards.

What complicates matters is that Carmella is willing to charge anything she can't afford. She owes \$8, \$88 on her credit cards, has no job, and relies on her ailing father to write her checks for her basic needs. She's depending upon an inheritance which she's quickly spending, and though she sometimes voices concern for her future, she is unwilling to curb her appetites and live frugally. She's a hypochondriac, she spends hundreds of dollars every month on mood medication, antidepressants, Chinese herbs and acupuncture, testosterone cream, all meant to keep her mental chimera of suffering, tortured, bohemian artist alive. Don't all artists pop pills and suffer from mental ailments? Or was that only Elizabeth Wurtzel, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath?

Though there are qualities in Carmella that I love, her cynical sense of humor, her taste, her interest in arts (though I sense that her interest is driven more by fear than anything else, fear that she'll no longer be cool if she doesn't keep up with the latest, and hippest trends), there is much that distresses me. It is, for example, difficult for me to sympathize with her money problems - she refuses to work, to get any sort of job which would alleviate her financial problems. "I can't work, I'm unable to work", she whines. Instead, she'd rather grovel and plead and beg her father for monetary support. She is dependant on him, and has no real independence. And while I can understand her need for time to write, to paint, I can't help but dislike her for her spendthrift ways, living under the circumstances that she does. She says she can't work, because she is an artist and must work at her art, but does this mean she should live on handouts from her father only to spend them on expensive restaurant meals, sending her laundry out, and feeding her imagined illnesses and syndromes with quick medicine?

Carmella is difficult, and I suppose she'd say that I am difficult as well, that I'm a hypocrite, a flirt, a clotheshorse perhaps. That I'm a dilettante playing at being an artist, that I've no real talent, that I like to play at the bohemian life. She accused me once of being "middle-class". I suppose the worst sort of insult she could muster. I suppose I am, after all. But I'm not in debt, I take care of myself, I don't rely on others for my support, my "art", such as it is, is done at all because I *like to do it*, not because I expect a payoff, in fact, now that my online journal has been moved here, to Our Secret Lives, I doubt that many people read it at all. I don't care. It doesn't matter. I enjoy it, Julian enjoys it, our select friends enjoy it. I care naught for fame, for publication, for recognition of any kind. Accolades wouldn't improve my life, nor my opinion of myself. I am happy just to be alive, to spend as much time as I can with Julian, to improve our lives, our knowledge, to enrich ourselves.

when forced to be in such close contact with strangers. Inevitably they eat, they chew gum, listen to noisy headphones, clack away on laptops and handheld gadgets, or blab away uninterestingly on their little cellular telephones. I sit a little diagonally, and put my bottle of Tejava at my side. I bury my head in my book, I look odd. Plentiful antisocial vibrations emit from my body. Most of the time this tactic works.

But today, a young woman, quite thin, garbed in “fashionable” black leather, sat next to me. She had with her an enormous backpack, the sort which becomes a rolling suitcase with the extension of a long handle. She wore headphones which discharged the pauciatric reverberations of what I believe to be called “R and B”. A hard backed copy of *The Da Vinci Code* appeared, and finally, a foil-wrapped pair of greasy, odiferous cinnamon toasts.

§ **November 8, 2004.** I’m surrounded by morons. Behind me a pink-faced, fat-faced man-boy listening to headphones, mouthing the words, audibly I hear, “Mother-fucking, blah, blah, blah ... Mother-fucking, blah, blah, blah ...” Next to him, two pre-adolescent girls test their cellular telephone ring tones, nodding their heads to the “plat” digital beeps. Further up, an Indian man speaks ultra loudly on his cellular telephone, while the two Chinese men next to me lustily discuss the computer games and software they covet.

As I sit here, reflecting on the riders of the local, I come to realize that most of my journal writing of late has been done on the train. So much of my journal is bogged down with my thoughts of the train and its passengers. I must stop this practice if I am to write of anything else.

Julian bought our tickets to the Welcome to the Hypnodrome today! We’re going with Chimes, Kenneth and Philippe. Before the show, we’ve reservations to eat at the Schnitzlehaus! Oh! I am so excited for this evening. How am I to wait until next week? Schnitzle! And spaetzle! And beer! And the company of such fine gentlemen who will accompany us, and thoroughly enjoy the Hypnodrome show. Now this is an evening which will be well worth every penny.

§ **November 11, 2004.** We’re absolutely broke, so poor. I fear for our finances these next several months with property taxes due, and the holidays looming. Julian and I never buy each other gifts, but there are the others, our families, the expense of trips to visit relatives, incidentals.

Guy’s birthday falls several days after Thanksgiving this year, and Carmella has invited us to spend it with them, at Chez Puisse, one of the most expensive restaurants in the Bay Area. I, of course, agreed to go, several weeks ago, but with our financial situation looking so poorly, I fear I must cancel. I dread her reaction. I am afraid that she will be angry with me. But cancel I must, if we are to eat at all this month. Our 10th wedding anniversary falls on the 19th, and we’ve no money with which to celebrate this special event. But that’s not to say that we would choose to celebrate it expensively if we *did* have the money to do so, for Julian and I, despite appearances, have simple tastes, and would cherish nothing more than to spend it together, at home, our most comfortable and beautiful sanctuary, with a meal of pizza and wine, and a game of Scrabble! This is to be our anniversary present to one another.

I composed an email to Carmella, explaining our difficulties, our regrets, and wondering if Guy should like me to cook him a meal at home instead. If she is angry, if she no longer desires to be my friend, then I shouldn’t wonder that she is no friend at all. I hope she understands, and yet, again, I am tired of the high maintenance she requires, of walking on eggshells around her.

I’ve put *Incest* out onto the seat next to me hoping that the title will discourage anyone from sitting next to me. Unlike the limited, the local train is filled with loud talkers, boisterous cell phone users, and kids coming home from private school. The limited is crowded, but with tired commuters who read quietly or stare blankly out the windows. When my foot has healed, I’ll be back with the quiet commuters, able to run for the limited each afternoon at five.

My nails are now an inch long. I’m asked how I manage to do anything, but it doesn’t seem to matter, I tell them. I paint them a dark matte *aubergine*, or midnight blue, or dark brown, or crimson, or silver, or black. There is something both grotesque and beautiful about them all at the same time. I was inspired to grow my nails to such lengths by a woman I saw on television, “Sell This House”, I think the program was called. She was pale, with long dark hair and nails, a dark goddess of New York City living with a nebbish husband, a publisher of science fiction novels, in a shadowy downtown loft. I had the feeling they were wealthy; that the publishing business was more of an excuse to make a living, set up for Nebbish by his father. There were nineteenth-century ancestral paintings in the loft, stored away in a closet. “Oh yes, that is my great-grandfather and grandmother”, Nebbish sheepishly explains. The aforementioned goddess never again made an appearance after the initial introductions and premise was established, making her all the more interesting, all the more mysterious, all the more unobtainable.

The clouds are amassing to the west; there’s to be a storm tonight.

A girl has sat next to me. She has a large bunch of balloons, one of which says “Happy Birthday”. I’m mortified to think that anyone should think that I have anything to do with them, that they are mine. Next to her, a plate of something, wrapped in cellophane. Cake? Cookies? Is this party detritus? Or is she on her way to making party detritus?

A woman in a motorized wheelchair chews her gum in big gaping chomps, teeth bared, as a skull might.

A man sits across the aisle from me, pen in hand, a yellow legal pad in his lap, staring out the window, the words not coming for him. His hair is cut the way one would have done in the time and place of Jean Valjean, his throat is covered with a thick fur, though he is delicate. I imagine him coping with his mental problems, the hospitals, the shock treatment. But is that a laptop I see in his bag? And does this nullify my thoughts? Would a mentally ill person tote a laptop around? Perhaps it is one of those “prop” laptops one sees in furniture stores, maybe he is pretending at commuting, an exercise endorsed by his doctor, “This will help him to assimilate normally,” he says.

A black man with enormous headphones reads a purpley bound novel by Mercedes Lackey. Could a mass market paperback author’s name *be* more apt? A CD case appears. How is it that one can read and listen to music? Ah, that I could.

The sky grows darker and the estuary is grey, cold, almost frosty. I think sadly about the waterfowl.

I’ve lost another pound.

§ **October 28, 2004.** Julian has been feeling ill, unhappy, but still determined to go North this weekend. Why is it that we always seem to fall ill when it is a holiday, a vacation, or some other event meant to arouse happiness? I sometimes wonder if the body, in anticipation of a rest, lets itself go.

Carmella picked me up this morning at 11 for lunch and a film at the Balboa theatre, the French *Neux Rouge*. I dressed carefully, in what I thought was a sufficiently fun, but elegant outfit. I love to dress for Carmella, who is one of the only people I know who truly appreciates individual fashion. But when I got into her car she moaned, "Oh, you look *so* nice." Why must people say this sort of thing as if looking nice were a tragedy? Carmella was her usual New York punky self, but we looked swell together, I thought. Carmella never wears skirts or dresses, and I never wear pants, and I suppose this fundamental wardrobe difference might be part of the problem. I am a "girly" girl, while she is a tough gal in the same vein as Patty Smith, Nico, or Marianne Faithfull. We are an odd couple.

After the film, which I liked very much (Carmella hated it), I was dropped at Union Square so I could stop in at Yves Saint Laurent before getting my hair cut. I'd seen a scarf in *Jane* magazine, and could not get it out of my mind. I see something that catches my eye, initially deny myself this thing, then obsess about it for weeks. And so it was for this damned scarf. I felt like a real outsider striding into YSL, but tried to act like I owned the place, like I shop couture all the time, don'tcha know. I was greeted by the doorman, who bowed deeply, then by the Persian saleswoman who loudly cooed, "Oh! You're so beautiful! You're so beautiful!", bowing and scrapping and reaching for my hand; my act, evidently, was working. I felt like shrieking, but having come this far I looked at the wretched scarf, which as it turned out was a hideous shade of brown and not black. So with much relief I left, checking off the damnable YSL scarf from my mental list, then purging it from my hard drive. I must quit my habit of flipping through fashion magazines, for without a doubt I spot some item that bores deep into my id, riddling my ego with holes. Especially now that I've no more money to spend, to play with. I am once again broke.

§ **October 29, 2004.** We always drive to Gualala taking the back roads, the road less travelled, if I may be so stupidly rite. There is a road which cuts over to the coast from Healdsburg. It winds through the mountains. A little two lane road where not a car goes by for the several hours it takes to cross the pass, the Borgo Pass I called it this trip because it sounds better than Steags Spring Road. Julian points out that Borgo Pass just means Steags Spring Road in Romanian.

Our little road has been improved since the last time we drove it last December. It's been widened, and the trees which hovered so closely along the edges, cracking the asphalt, and proffering humps and pits, are gone. Still, the oak trees drip with tillandsia *comme d'habitude*, and the Baulhaus playing from the car stereo leads a suitably dreary air to our drive through the forest.

When we arrive at the Seaciff, I'm greeted by Nancy, who has greeted me these last eight years we've escaped to this motel. Her cat has died, she is loathe to go to the Halloween party at the Gualala Hotel, she wants to take a trip to Savannah. I'm dumbstruck by her weird hippy logic, trapped by her long winded explanations that I've encouraged by seeming concerned, but there is something I like about her anyway. I wonder to myself if we would be friends should we live in Gualala. Would she treat me to her home-made bran bans? Teach me build a tree house? Invite me to partake of pagan rituals deep in the haunted coastal mountains? I make excuses and leave with the key to our room.

We spend the afternoon drinking champagne, talking, and love-making. Then, after gorging on small gourmet pizzas, chocolate truffles, and more champagne, we fall into a deep sleep with the doors and windows wide open to the surf and wind and serial killers.

§ **October 30, 2004.** I awoke feeling ill from last night's indulgences. After living on nothing but meat, vegetables, and fruit for two months, sugar is quite a shock to one's system, not to mention the cheap champagne. Julian awoke feeling sick as well, but more from his ailment, what seems to be allergies or bronchitis. Unable to muster up the strength to go out for a meal or explore the woods, we instead stayed abed flipping channels and snacking on apples, German rye bread, and cream cheese, getting up now and again to survey the beach and lagoon, this time of year filled with pelicans gnashing their wings against the water, and the lone tourist and his dog who frightens the wildlife away. Through the binoculars I curse the presence of man, and will a rogue wave to come and sweep the abomination and his best friend away - but it never happens.

Towards sundown, we dragged ourselves out for a walk in the park, along the cliff side where the waves are particularly large. There are several benches, each studded with a plaque, honouring some dead person or another. I note that each died before he should have done, "Don Pricketts forever between the land and sea, 1949-1991", or, "Janet Huber, may you rest before the glory of his creation, 1932-1996." It is depressing, these reminders of our mortality, our youthful mortality, with the grey skies, the wind, the loneliness, the feeling of infinity and our insignificance. I hate these plaques. I wish to think of death on my own terms. I adore graveyards, especially those which about the ocean, there are several I know of up the road from Gualala, but these cheesy memorials I hate in a place I go to to forget mankind and the realities of human life. Julian instead pontificates on outer space as he often does when we're on vacation, away from people, alone, with no distractions. I sometimes think he would have been happy as an astronomer or physicist.

For dinner, small gourmet pizzas washed down by gin and tonics served in plastic motel room cups while watching *Carrie* and *Salem's Lot* on television. It's all so decadent.

§ **October 31, 2004.** I started the day by taking a very long bath in the "jacuzzi tub for two." This "jacuzzi tub for two" is too big, and the jets create mountains of unwanted bubble-bath bubbles. Julian came to my rescue by bailing bubbles into the shower stall with the ice bucket. I read from the *Oxford Book of English Ghost Stories*, starting on page 190, with Mary E. Wilkins' "The Lost Ghost." Julian wasn't up for another walk, nor a canoe trip up the river, so I stayed on in the tub, reading, resting, thinking that if this were my own bathroom, I'd have installed the window above the tub a bit lower so as to look out the window and enjoy the view of the waves while soaking. What *was* the architect thinking when he placed the window so?

We set out for the Gualala Hotel about six (I couldn't fathom another gourmet pizza for dinner), I in my new nink hat, Julian in his tweeds. We asked to be put at the back of the dining room, in the dim, away from the other diners. I could sense that the hostess and the waitress were annoyed with our wishes, but to sit so close to others, for them to hear our conversation (for the other diners sat mute, staring at each other, waiting for their food to arrive so that they might wolf it down and return to their in-room HBO), was unthinkable. We ate lightly, still full, and slightly ill, from our weird diet, then returned to our motel room to begin our evening. After carving our pumpkin, drinking a few gin and tonics, and searching for something decent to watch on television, we cut bait, and went to bed.

§ **November 3, 2004.** Each morning on the train, I do my best to subtly encourage others from sitting next to me. This is not because I feel entitled to two seats, rather I bristle

his eyes at my observations, "Those people you work with!" he says. No, it is not me; it *is* them. But why should I expect to fit in at all? Anywhere? Why shouldn't I always be misunderstood? I know this. And yet, I am continually baffled, and confused, and hurt by the "themes" of this world. I merely dress nicely (albeit a bit "artistically", shall we say), behave kindly, honestly, and honourably, mind my own business, and try to live life with a bit of flair, panache, and wit. I think of David McDermott, who speaks of being born in the wrong century, and I can't help but think that it is my problem as well. If I had been born in the earlier half of the 20th century, or earlier, I think I would fit in quite well, I am sure of it.

Is this why I am so drawn to the past? Is it because I find so much of my integral essence there? And is this why I am continually chided, misunderstood, and ostracized? For people it seems, our society I should say, look constantly to the future and discard the past like so much *ordure* in the *poibelle*. The past is simply not valued. Manners and decorum, dignity and politesse are seen as so much humbug baggage, and those who would deem these values important, who would cultivate and employ them, are looked upon with suspicion. "David McDermott wants to bring back slavery!", someone was quoted as saying in *The 28th Instance of June, 1914*. But no, it is explained, he loves the manners and decorum, the dignity and politesse, the accoutrements of the age, the houses, the clothes, the objects - it is not about politics! It is about preserving and cultivating those aspects of the past which are *superior*. It is about learning from the past to become a better person *now*.

Why must people be so consummately one-dimensional, so dull, so suspicious of the creative force, of living "otherly", of the *enjoyment* of life?! It is no wonder that I spend my free time at home, holed up in my beautiful apartment with the high ceilings and Mediterranean arches with Julian, Mr. Darcy, and little Miss Moppet, dreaming my dreams, living life my way, in the anachronistic world I've created for myself. Outside there is naught but those who would point and stare, who would misunderstand me, who would feel hostile and suspicious at the very sight of me. I have felt this way, felt these things my entire life. And *this* is what it has culminated in: a life spent detached from the "real" world, indulging my fantasies and cultivating my eccentricities.

I am happy when I forget the "others". I am happy when I meet someone new who appears to have a similar life view, who values honour and integrity as well as eccentricity, creativity, and a life lived beautifully. I am happy to have fashioned this sort of life for myself, on the 9th floor of a downtown San Francisco, 1929 Art Deco building, filled with our treasures, our books, our music, our little fluffy animals, and our 19th century, Louis XV beds. I am happy to have made all those wonderful little discoveries that make life continually wonderful. This last year, it was The Brother Quay, Lech Jankowski, silent films, absinthe, Bruges, Polish food, and painting. May the next year be as fruitful, with a trip to Chicago on the train in June, a trip to New Orleans on the train for our anniversary in November, new friends, improved paintings, and a svelter figure. Discoveries of new books, new artists, new music, and new recipes. And if we're lucky, a *chaise longue* in the manner of Napoleon III!

§ **January 11, 2005.** I've just now finished reading Huysmans' "J'a-Bais". Some memorable quotes I marked down along the way:

"I learned long ago that there are no people interesting to know except saints, scoundrels, and cranks. They are the only persons whose conversation amounts to anything. Persons of good sense are necessarily dull, because they revolve over and over again the tedious topics of everyday life.

they could...if they knew. As Julian says, they all hate us because we are different, and I believe him. I think of my attempts at befriending co-workers, neighbors, people we're thrown together with by chance and not by choice. I am usually betrayed. They laugh at me behind my back, gossip, find me ridiculous, pretentious. I am continually misunderstood. I am merely myself. And to cope, I tell myself it is only that they are jealous, that I am too intelligent, that my world must seem raffish and remote. And so, it is a dysfunctional existence; the more I perceive that I am persecuted, the more I remove myself from their world. And the more I remove I become, the more misunderstood I am. And isn't setting myself apart, consciously, part of coping? By making myself *different* or *weird*, aren't I putting distance between myself and others? Distance which will ensure that I don't risk potentially hurtful or disappointing relationships? Am I my own worst enemy? And yet, I am comfortable this way. But I am knowledgeable enough to know that what is comfortable isn't often what is best.

§ **November 28, 2004.** Last night, Julian and I met Guy and Carmella at her place, so we could then drive together to Bucci's for Guy's birthday meal. It was clear that Carmella and Guy had been arguing. So much of their existence, it seems, is spent arguing, or angry, frustrated with life and the bad hand it has dealt each one of them. They turn on one another, trusting that all will be forgiven, forever recreating childhood dramas and heartaches.

But Carmella and Guy are good actors, and they are very well mannered, the two of them, and so the evening went exactly as planned, Guy told us stories, Julian listened appreciatively, Carmella pouted, complaining of a stomachache, and then later a headache. I laughed at everyone's jokes, encouraging Guy to enjoy himself; it was his birthday, after all. One might have thought that Carmella felt resentful. She does hate special occasions.

We brought Guy several presents, things we found at home that we thought he'd like, a copy of "Around the World in Eighty Minutes", a "Birth of Venus" pillow. Julian dug out a map of Iowa City. I dug out the coloured pencils, scissors and tape. And happily, we had something fun for Guy for his birthday. What is a birthday without presents?

Bucci's is an old standby. I ate there often with Annie and Alain once upon a time, when I lived in a warehouse space in Emeryville, just there, just down the road two steps. Annie would knock on my door and say, "Let's go to dinner at Bucci's. We'll just have a glass of wine and split a Caesar salad. It'll be cheap." Of course, it never was. Inevitably we'd all order entrées to go with our Caesar salad, split in two. And I'd pay with my credit card, never having any cash on me. Alain and Annie would muster up most of the cash they owed. I always ended up the worse for having eaten out with them. I soon learned to leave my credit card at home and bring cash instead. I now leave our finances completely up to Julian. I am freed from the tyranny of splitting checks, indeed, when we were flush, we'd cavalierly request that we just split the bill three, or four, or five ways, no matter that we'd eaten less than everyone else; haggling over money is so boorish. Easy enough to have said then, but now that we are once again poor, we're back to hasty addition, skipping desert, and ordering pasta instead of meat dishes. Carmella, I could tell, was annoyed at our new status, "Is there a problem?," she asked; Julian had fished out \$54 from his pocket instead of requesting that we split the bill four ways.

We returned to Carmella's place. I showed her my drawings. She oohed and aahed appreciatively, then later said that all undergraduate, and for that matter, graduate art, is crap. Carmella told us about her plans to attend a writing workshop next summer in New York at Skidmore Col-

lege. She is obviously proud to have been accepted, but I can't help but wonder, don't they accept pretty much everyone? Is it really so exclusive? I suppose I sound jealous, but I can assure you that I am not. It's just that I'm bothered by her castles in the sky, her belief that her attendance at said workshop will somehow launch her to fame. She's driven, painfully, to believe that success is all about who one knows, about name dropping, about rubbing elbows with the "in" crowd. To use her expression, she is a determined hipster, a determined middle-aged hipster. Is this, I wonder, what is known as a mid-life crisis?

I sit in Carmella's dimly lit bedroom with her, talking of clothes and haircuts and other girly things, while Julian and Guy sit out in the parlor. I hear Julian tell the punch line of one his stories; Guy laughs. Carmella tells me that I should stop "reading all those women's magazines, and then you'll quit caring if you're attractive any more." I wonder silently what women's magazines those would be, and how would she know anyway, when she adds, "It's so liberating not to care anymore." In the dim light, Carmella looks like an aged Woody Allen, her jowls hanging down below her black horn-rimmed man's glasses. I feel like saying, "Quit caring about rubbing elbows with people like Rick Moody, quit attending those stupid writers workshops, quit reading all that stupid trendy fiction, and then maybe you'll quit this stupid charade, this ridiculous dream of becoming a 'famous' writer. Quit caring so much about what other people think about you. Liberate yourself from the slavery of peer pressure."

§ December 1, 2004. Once again, I fear I've put someone off. But not because I was too stand offish. Rather, because I spilled my guts. I'm broken. When it comes to social skills, making new friends, playing it cool, I am broken. Some people find it so easy. I think of Andrew, and his many friends, his ability to fit in everywhere while still retaining his individuality. I've always marveled at people like Andrew, and wondered how it is they do it. I am either too stand-offish, or too intimate. I have small talk and so I skip to the important stuff. I forget the power of mystery when it is most important to cling to it. I, myself, have even said, no so very long ago, how I often lose interest in someone, once the mystery is gone, how when I find out too much, when I discover qualities and interests I don't like, I'm apt to drop an acquaintance, a possible friend. I suppose this has happened to me.

I passed by Mitchell Mort's cubicle Monday afternoon on the way to the human resources department. I'd not seen him since after the election, and I'd imagined him so broken by the outcome, that he'd needed weeks to recover - his cubicle is coated inches deep in anti-bush propaganda, cartoons, posters. Don't get me wrong, I'm no Bush lover, but he is an extremist, a politically correct, Kuthulu flute playing, pow-wow attending, pony-tail wearing vegan, an archetypal Californian, an original hippy. I'd always been a little disdainful of him and his evangelical approach to diet and lifestyle, but lately I've been kinder to him. We are both of us misfits, and save the accoutrements and lifestyle choices, I see no difference in us, really. Anyway, I passed by his cube, and he was there, his curly hair hanging down, out of its customary low ponytail so common among aging, balding programmers. I said to him, "Oh! Hello! I've not seen you for awhile. I love your hair down like that. It's so much more ... romantic!" He lit up. He was flustered. He turned red. He thanked me.

I've lost four more pounds.

out in front of him and gestured as if to slow an oncoming out-of-control train. I opened my mouth to speak,

"Oh no! No! No!", he said, "Neither Mrs. Arbutnot nor I ever use jams or jellies of any kind!"

"But I made this from the lemons from your tree..."

"I *know*", he said, cutting me off in a most presumptuous way, "But Mrs. Arbutnot and I never use jams or jellies of any kind, so it would just be thrown away."

He was irritated. I was *irritating* him. I turned on my heel and strode off, shocked that he would not even acknowledge that I'd done something nice, and *for him!* Would it have killed him to say "Thank you"? Would it have been so very awful to accept the gift, then pass it on to someone who *would* appreciate it? For Pete's sake, it's only thoughtful to bring him something nice made from the lemons he takes such pains to bring in by the bag load every day in January, right? Apparently the favor can't be returned, but I don't doubt that if our fearless leader, Mr. überboss, had taken the pains to make marmalade, he would have bowed and scrapped and gladly taken it. I can't help but think that since I'm just some peon who works in the programming ghetto, my beneficence doesn't register, that it is unworthy of positive consideration.

But don't think I'm all that shocked - it doesn't *really* surprise me. This sort of behaviour is so in keeping with my office's social code, so typical. I can't forget, and haven't yet forgiven, Jeffrey Cool's heinous manners. I can't even look at him now, though he tries to act as if nothing were wrong. And then there's that whole debacle concerning Sandy Campbell and Jamie Carrow (who used to work with me.) It's ironic, is what it is. These people, I'm sure, consider themselves to be most liberally inclined, kind, generous, "right" living, giving to all the right charities, diligently heeding the advice doled out on NPR, reading all the latest books and seeing all the latest films which address the subjects of equality, cultural awareness, and gender studies. But when it comes to interacting with actual human beings, when it comes to reality, these people are more ignoble, more avaricious, more puritanical, more miserly, more closed-minded than any I've ever known. These people, who never take a vacation, who never go anywhere, who eat lunches comprised of canned Mandarin oranges packed into the smallest little tupperware container in existence, who never buy any new clothes (nor show up in "new" thrift store togs either), whose appearances and personalities in every way are bland, bland, bland. There is no flair, there is no fine living, there is no *joie de vivre*.

And when they *are* presented with anything which falls into the category of style/fashion/art of the "alternative" type, they are threatened and become judgmental. My outfits have always been ridiculed in a back-hand sort of way, I've been ordered to quit wearing any perfume to the office, I've been told I look as if I were going to a cocktail party, and now my pretty lemon marmalade has been rejected. What I don't know, but suspect all the same, is that my huge rubber plant that juts up above the cubicle walls is resented, that the 1930s encyclopedia set and etiquette books in my cubicle are sniggered at, that the branches and old keys that decorate it are looked on as "weird", and that the flocked wall-paper I put up over the cubicle walls is derided daily. (I also keep a marble urn lamp, stained yellow from years of nicotine in its previous owner's house, and framed 19th century French dance-hall posters, but these are all covered by co-workers who aren't so very subtle. "What is that? What? What's that? Well, can I have *if* if you don't want it anymore, I mean, when you don't want it anymore?")

But is it just me? Is it me who is to blame for these lamentations? Julian is continually rolling

§ **January 8, 2005.** Julian and I slept very late today, then rose and dressed to do several errands: GrammaPhone, to rent Il Posto and 28th Instance of 1914, then Brownie's for canning jars.

Following a light lunch of tomato soup and clementines, we drove out to Ocean Beach to view the waves, which were rumored to be high. The rain was beginning to pick up again, so we were unable to walk to the promontory. And then, the tide was low, so the waves really weren't at all very exciting. And so, feeling a bit short-changed, we instead drove through Seaciff and up the hill to Pacific Heights to walk up and down the Lyon street steps to admire the mossy and lichen-covered balustrades, the tiny topiary garden, and the silent ivy laden mansions. Julian and I, we posed with statues, bowed deeply to a handsome hawk, saved a few earthworms, and hid in a gothic doorway as the rain again began, replete with a well-timed stroke of lightning.

Back at home, I cut Julian a slice of the citron tarte I'd made Friday night, began simmering the Meyer lemons for marmalade, poured a cup of tea, then sat on the bed and watched the rain and the clouds with Miss Dinah Moppet for several hours.

§ **January 9, 2005.** I was tempted to stay at home today, rather than accompany Julian to the library as I usually do. I need to read, I need to stay quiet, I need to be alone, but since Julian leaves Thursday and will be gone for a week, I reconsidered, and now here I am.

I've so much correspondence to catch up on, and need especially to write to Carmella, whom I've been purposefully neglecting these past weeks - I just can't bring myself to actually *see* her, ever since that last debacle. And I suspect that when I do speak with her next, she'll want to pin us down on a date to go out to Guy's place way out in Danville, another task I just can't face. Carmella is such a chore. And yet, I do miss her, and I remember fondly our springtime walks. She's switched medication since then though, and it's made all the difference. How will this friendship turn out? I sense it will all end in tears, and soon.

Gina is full of conversation today, telling me of her Christmas trip to Louisiana to visit family, of meals of clam fritters, cornbread, and Key lime pie. I love her stories of her Grandmother wiping her hands on her apron, canning peaches in the screen-in porch, hatching chicks, playing amongst the enormous roots of 300 year old oak trees dripping with moss. The South seems so appealing to me, and I love Southern food. I must visit, someday. I've plotted trips to New Orleans and environs, many times, but somehow, they never seem to turn out. I've books documenting decayed Southern mansions and their interiors, daguerreotypes of New Orleans street scenes and bordellos, and myriad 78s, recipe books, maps, and personal memoirs. I sometimes feel like what I'd imagine a Southern girl to be, girlish and sweet, dainty, feminine, though courageous and strong.

§ **January 10, 2005.** On the shuttle this morning, a horrible little foot stuck into a horrible little shoe. A grey nylon sock betwixt the two, sagging a bit. The kind which winds down around ones instep after walking a ways.

I arrived at work bearing gifts for Mr. Arbuthnot. I hung up my Carbo coat and Venetian scarf, I put away my pretty little umbrella with the pagoda top and ruffled edges, I gave Mr. Arbuthnot's jar of Meyer lemon marmalade a final polish and headed off to his desk at the other side of the building. Mr. Arbuthnot, busy in his cubicle with the low, glass walls, saw me approaching from the hallway. I smiled and held out the marmalade. He stuck his arms straight

§ **December 3, 2004.** Since Monday, I've noticed that Mitchell Mott is no longer wearing his hair ponytail. It hangs wild and free from the back of his head like a curly blond false beard. He's also been hanging around my cube. Today, he came by asking me if I'd seen a wasp fly by. I amused him for ten minutes discussing my fear of Wolf spiders. It appears he may *like* me, now that I've told him he looks romantic.

Jeffrey Cool has suggested that we all get together again soon. "We haven't gone out in ages!", he said to me this morning. I'm left feeling confused, since our last outing with them seemed almost to come to blows, at least as far as I was concerned it did. I'm relieved that Jeffrey and Sharon don't hate us, because who *wants* to be hated, but still, I do not want to socialize with them further for fear that our working relationship would suffer. One shouldn't socialize with co-workers, or rather, I shouldn't. My personal life, my interests, my beliefs, my lifestyle, are all too far beyond what is considered to be normal. I risk exactly that which I fear most, rejection, ridicule, gossip. And for this to happen behind my back, at work, this would be most damaging, for I must keep my income.

§ **December 4, 2004.** I received an invitation to an art opening next Friday from Carmella. Several of her pieces will be in the show. I wrote back to tell her how excited I was for her, that we'd be there. She wrote back, "I'm gonna be there early and then probably take off....so hopefully you can come early?"; that is, she'll be there early, in a foul mood, then leave right away because openings stress her out. She's been known create scenes, to throw drinks in people's faces, to scream and cry, and drop to the ground, and refuse to be reasonable while everyone stares, months agape, backing off, slowly. I don't want to go, it will not be fun, but what can I do? Carmella is my friend, and I simply, must, go. One must grit ones teeth and hope for the best. Perhaps the art will be good, and there may be some interesting people there. And maybe Carmella will *do* something - it's all grist for the mill.

We've bought Julian two new pairs of shoes from Paolo, a wool three button suit from Nordstrom, and a pair of lovely socks and a very special tie. We're still dreaming of a lovely Harris tweed three piece suit seen at Cable Car Clothiers, but alas, we cannot afford it. But how I want him to have it!

§ **December 5, 2004.** Julian has gone off to the library, and I've stayed home to write. I've spent half the afternoon making tea, preparing a dullish lunch of tomato soup and cheese, watching old Dana Andrews movies on the Fox Movie Channel, and reading posts on some time wasting Yahoo! groups I still belong to. But all is not shuffling from one inane activity to the next. I have been slightly productive. I made a big pot of Hungarian goulash Friday, and put up the little aluminum Christmas tree. I sewed some dangling buttons back into place, and finished trimming one of my hats. Best of all, I finally finished most of my correspondence yesterday, correspondence I'd been putting off for some time. How much easier it is to talk by telephone; I do much of the listening, and not much of the talking. I love to ask questions, to hear stories, to laugh at jokes, to encourage, to support my friends in their endeavors no matter how futile (I think of Carmella - but perhaps she will be successful and show me what's what?)

Later I will take a bath. I feel seedy after several days worth of hearty eating, which included cheese steaks, and cheesecakes, and a motley brew of chocolates and wines and other treats. It's

back to business as usual after a nice little break. The Annaïs blouse awaits, and I would love to wear it at Christmas with one of my pretty skirts.

§ **December 6, 2004.** On the shuttle this morning I overheard a discussion between the snorting hominidus and an older gentleman about his idea concerning a shirt where the placard would double as a tie.

Last night was our building's annual Christmas party. We always attend, hoping that something interesting will happen, or that we'll at least be able to glean some gist for the mill, somehow. Sophie was there with a large wheel of Brie and one of Reblochon she'd ordered from France, as well as a large array of organic French wines from Provence. I was delighted and stunned to have such special treats at this, of all Christmas parties. We thanked her profusely. "My friend from Air France is coming later. She is very chic. She can help you with your tickets, anything, you know," she kept saying, but her friend, much to my dismay, never arrived.

Julian and I, we piled our plates high, with sliced ham, wedges of Sophie's cheese, tiny slices of pizza, sausage rolls, and retreated to a table at the back of the room. We were soon joined by a tall thin man with animal like teeth. Al, he introduced himself as, and by Sid, who I'd seen around the building, carting a mountain bike up the freight elevator and what not. We exchanged the usual pleasantries, "what a lovely party", "which unit do you live in", "how long have you lived here," and so forth. The merits of living on one side of the building as opposed to the other were debated, and then we all fell silent, having run out of the niceties that strangers who've no desire to get to know better exchange with one another. Al tried breaking the ice with a tale of his visit to Hoofers. Not wanting to be outdone, I trotted out my story of having once worked at an oil refinery, the punch line being, "I learned how to handle rough men there." Al thought that was just hilarious, as I thought he would (gay are always receptive to such banter), but Sid just stared at me with a blank look on his face. I now realize that he didn't think it was funny because he himself engages in some such rough work, construction, or something - he'd earlier that evening mentioned he had a union meeting to attend later and would have to be leaving soon.

Sid wandered off, his face red. Julian excused himself to go sit on the floor with James. I too was about to flee when Al leaned over to tell me that he was thinking of ordering accordian shades in black denim, and what did I think of it. "It's to tie in with my black and orange colour scheme. I've got a black leather couch, and an orange fur rug," I nodded and blinked and excused myself for some cake.

§ **December 7, 2004.** Is it a crime to smell good? And why must crustaceans like Jeffrey Cool and his ilk ruin my existence and the little bit of joy I glean from such sensuous pleasures as good scent?

I had a call yesterday afternoon from Nancy, our part-time corporate out-sourced inhuman resources "lady". "I hate to bother you, blah blah blah, but are you wearing perfume or cologne? We've had a complaint from someone who sits near you that your perfume or cologne is bothering them, blah blah blah, so *we'd* really appreciated it, blah blah blah, if you'd quit wearing your perfume or cologne to the office. I'm sorry to bother you, blah blah blah, but people just can't breathe, blah blah blah. Blah blah blah, Goodbye."

exercise.

§ **January 6, 2005.** I had a fit of melancholia this afternoon, so took to my bath. I instructed Julian to play funeral music, and so he did. It cheered me up considerably, enough to play several games of scrabble (Julian won), and prepare a nice dinner of radicchio and maché salad, clementines, and tomato soup. Julian leaves for Boston next week, and I guess I'm feeling a little unhappy. I wish I could accompany him, but I'm unable to take leave from the horrid job at present, with not enough vacation time nor money, not to mention the dramatic chaos which keeps me chained to the computer for reasons too dull to discuss ["The Office" is changing platforms, from an old mainframe to a UNIX environment, and everything must be rewritten and tested before the end of February. All this, besides all my regularly assigned projects, which of course are all priority 1A (this means the project is of higher priority than either "1" or "A").]

I spent my meagre disposable income this week on candles (Dyptique's Myrth and John Galliano) and perfume (George Sand by Les Parfums historiques, Paris). Now I'm broke, but I firmly believe that if one takes care of the luxuries, the necessities will take care of themselves. I may as well admit that I bought a skirt and pillow from Anthropologie, though these were, at least, on sale.

Miss Moppet sits at my side. She wants me to get out the "stick", which is the tail end of an old cat toy, long ago destroyed by hours of play. The "stick" is the saddest little cat toy ever, but Miss Moppet loves it more than any of her other, newer toys. I'm sometimes tempted to throw the "stick" away, ugly and wrecked as it is, but mostly because Miss Moppet spends most of her waking hours crying for it, looking up at me with her sweet little face, mewling in the most sad little pathetic way. It is tiresome to have to entertain a cat, constantly. All the same I cannot throw away the "stick". It would be too heart-breaking for our poor little orphan, Miss Moppet. And what kind of person would deny a little orphan an old chewed-up stick, the humblest of playthings?

One of our closest friends, it seems, is considering a new life of crime. I hope he is successful, and allows me to join the gang. Visions of Bonnie and Clyde come to mind, but that would make me the woman who is later shot in the eye - I don't like this at all, but mostly because the woman is portrayed on film as dumpy, shrill, and unattractive - so this is where my Bonnie and Clyde fantasies stop. And yet, this is exactly how I've been feeling lately, minus the shrill, hence the melancholy this afternoon.

§ **January 7, 2005.** The rain has come, and with it, wind and chilly temperatures. I slivered on the train this morning while reading Hrysmans' "La bas", and pulled my raincoat more tightly around my neck. The man sitting next to me crumpled bread sticks coated with sesame seeds with his teeth, then stepped out at Palo Alto. A pretty girl whose face was marred by what I call "an cwant Silicon Valley hi-tech eye ware" pursed her lips and gazed out the window at the scenery of railroad easements trailing backward toward San Francisco.

I've looked out the window at the moss growing thick by the back door. It is a heady green, it loves the weather. I love moss, I love the weather, and I love green. I am happy with the wind blowing the lingering Poplar leaves through the rain and across the wet road.

§ December 29, 2004. For the past week I've been sick, feeling too miserable to do anything but create a deeper and deeper pit at the far left end of the couch. Coupled with my head cold, is an all-pervasive feeling of apathy and low-grade melancholia, what I like to call *malaisia*. Julian has had the blahs as well, and since we feed off one another's energy (we have a profound influence upon one another's psyche), we've slowly lost all intelligent life, this past week, coming to a slow, inert stop.

The food has been extremely bad around here. We've eaten a great deal of "holiday" food, which is all rather disgusting. Complicating things has been my reluctance to cook - one just doesn't feel like cooking when ill, does one? Consequently, we've been left feeling lumpy and dull, in addition to having the post-holiday blahs. All this culminated late last night - we talked for hours in the dark, in bed, about inspiration (and the lack of), about the time of year, about progress and projects and happiness, what success means, and finally, the importance (or unimportance) of love and friendship.

Again, I speak of friendship. Julian and I talked about each of our friends and their importance, what we like and dislike about each one. How we wish we knew our internet friends in person, that we could socialize with them locally, at home, in cafés, "but would this ruin our friendships?" I asked? "Should they meet us, should we meet them, would we dislike each other immediately?" Julian talked of soliciting friendship from interesting chaps at Live Journal, but being rebuffed, "Perhaps they don't like my interests", he said, but surely among those he chooses, there are many similar interests, similar life views. I suppose the explanation is that most people have many established friends already, and have neither the time, nor the energy to take on anymore. I too have failed at making new friends, but I wonder if it really matters. Why do we seek out others, anyway? Why do we crave friendship? I think of the times in my life when I was popular, when my telephone rang constantly, when I had many engagements, and rendez-vous, and affairs to put in order; frankly, friendship is work, and can be a chore. I think even now, of the few activities I'm expected to take part in, in order to *show* my friends that I care about them. Most of these are an obligation, time wasted both before and after, considering how I might get out of it, regretting that I wasted my time in attending.

Carmella and Guy are expecting us at Guy's in Danville tomorrow evening for dinner. At least, I *think* they are still expecting us. We've not spoken of this affair since last Monday - Carmella has been oddly quiet, and I am loathe to call her (If I call when she's in no mood to talk, it is a decidedly disagreeable task. One must wait for her to call, and not the other way 'round.) Julian and I do not want to go, that is, we *are not* going. I feel more and more that my friendship with Carmella is coming to an end - she is just too high maintenance, and there isn't enough pay-off; our friendship is a one way affair. But this is not to say that I will end things in a dramatic way, by calling her and stating, "Our friendship has come to an end, Carmella. Good-bye!" No, indeed, I will merely let things slide away. I will write her if she writes, I will talk to her if she calls, but I will suggest no social activities between the two of us, nor the four of us. Guy too has put us off. He is too broken, he isn't one of us, really, and then neither is Carmella.

I am out of tea, and I am broke. I will have no money until the 7th. This is not good. I feel homely and disgusting from a week spent on the couch under a blanket, sick and unkempt despite my best efforts to the contrary. How can one feel glamorous and sophisticated with chapped nostrils, a runny nose, and a pudgy body? A showing of "I Capture the Castle" last evening helped to raise my spirits somewhat. I find that I am looking toward spring with anticipation. And I hope that I will be well enough soon to begin going back to the pool for some much needed

"Goodbye," I said. I hung up the phone with what I'm sure was a disagreeable look on my face. Cologne? The outrage! I would never wear cologne! Doesn't she know that *cologne* is typically worn by men? This could only be the work of Jeffrey Cool, whose sensitivity to everything, his political correctness, his blandness of personality and life vision, is constantly at odds with my workplace existence. I marched to his cubicle; I wondered if he'd overheard my telephone ring and my monosyllabic answers. "Did you complain to human resources about my perfume?" Jeffrey's face turned beet red, his hands trembled. "Yes," he said. "Why couldn't you have come to me directly? Why did you need to make an *official* complaint?" "Well," he said, "it's not going to go into your file or anything, if that's what you're worried about." I was so angry that he'd *told on me*. "Did you think I'd not listen to you or respect your allergies?" I lied. "Did you think I'd say 'too bad Jeffrey'?" which is what I would have wanted to say, but what can one do?

I was so utterly appalled by this person's behaviour, by their lack of decency and courage. If my perfume, which is worn very discreetly by the way, and is of only the highest quality (none of that dime-store scent for me), really bothered them so much that they felt they needed to complain, I should have thought that it would have been much better form to approach me directly instead of going behind my back, complaining to a corporate automaton, making me look like a first-class jerk. What bad behaviour, passive-aggressive, so puritan. I am so fed up with Jeffrey Cool and his ilk. Unfortunately San Francisco and the Bay Area in general is thick with them.

I've always been friendly towards Jeffrey, have always said hello every morning (But does he go out of his way to say hello to me? No.), as a civilized person would do when arriving at work and walking past a co-worker's desk. I've listened to his dull stories, tried to be jocular, tried to see the interesting side of him (there is none), but he has done nothing but snub and insult me. And yet, why the offers of rides home? Why the interest in socializing? Only last week he said, "You've never been to such-and-such? We *really* must get together soon and go there." Is he just so damned clueless that he doesn't realize that his behaviour would infuriate me? I've been to his house, he's been to my house, we've socialized with him and his wretched wife on numerous occasions - we've worked together for *eight years*, I've worn perfume every day of my life, and this is the first I hear that there is a problem. "I thought we were friends," I said. "I hope we still are," he answered. Poor Jeffrey is either the biggest ass-down of all time, or he truly doesn't understand that friendship means friendliness, and hopefully trust and loyalty as well.

Once again, I lament, where to find good, real friends?

I was shot at on the train tonight. That is, the train was shot at, and I was sitting right next to where the bullet would have entered, had it entered. I am lucky that it didn't pierce the second of the double pained windows, or I would be dead - shot in the face, a bloody copy of Huysmans' "Les soeurs Vátard" in my lap.

I had just finished writing my last journal entry in the "grist" notebook I keep with me always. We'd just left Palo Alto where most of the express passengers embark, and the train was up to speed. It was dark, I was hungry and anticipating our evening meal of potato-leek soup. The train was quiet and I was hoping I'd be able to finish my book before we reached San Francisco. There was a sudden flash and loud pop next to my face. The outer window was shattered while the inner was merely cracked, badly.

I went back to my book. I looked up, briefly. The entire car was staring at me. I went back to my book. "You seem awfully calm," the man sitting across from me said. "I expect this sort of thing to happen all the time. Frankly, I'm surprised that it doesn't." He looked away. "Nothing

shocks me anymore," I added.

Looking back on my day, I'm more upset with Jeffrey Cool's behaviour, than I am at getting shot at. That speaks volumes about me.

§ December 11, 2004. I'm back in art school after three weeks of holidays and playing hooky. Sara failed to let me know that there was a room change this week. I found it nonetheless. I can't help but think that she's disappointed that I did. Why else wouldn't she have sent me notice?

God, I hate her! God, I hate this class.

On to discussing what "lines" are. Our model, a thirtyish man, is lounging nude ten feet in front of me. As Sara drones on, the model twists himself around so that his nude groin is facing me, *face en face*, his legs spread haphazardly.

What must the three little pigs, Rommie, Rosemary, and Barbara, think of this big bad wolf? I see them studying their handouts with much concentration, eyes averted, while Sara drones on and on about lines and line quality. I meanwhile roll my eyes and grit my teeth at this overly academic approach to something which is fundamentally intuitive - you either get it, or you don't - you either have it, or you don't. But don't tell Sara or the three little pigs, or their whole art school *maison d'etre* will go up in smoke.

The nude model stares off into space, his watch curls up fortiorly at his feet, a pile of Earth-shoes, cordory pants and lumberjack shirt nearby. He's a lovely tattoo of blue roses clustering at his left shoulder and trailing down his arm, but his hair wants cutting, and there's the quality of an opium addict together with health food nut about him. "What does the quality of line in this Matisse say?" "Playful?" quips Rommie. "Delicacy?" offers Rosemary. Sara turns to me, holding the badly photocopied Matisse out in front of her. I glare red hot needles into her. "Good! Good!" she says, turning back to Rommie, Rosemary, and Barbara.

"Okay, today, just be thinking about the differences in Nathan's body from the female. How his body is made up of more angular lines," Sara says with a flare for the obvious, as though we'd never considered a naked man before. Dureously, we got out our supplies, and turned to a fresh sheet of paper in our sketch-pads. Rommie, Rosemary, and Barbara gathered in to a giggling and grunting little gaggle at the far side of the room - I don't suppose they wanted to be too near to male nudity, but despite their precautions, they were, within twenty minutes of scraping ink across their paper, faced with an erection pointing directly at them, acutely, mockingly. "I am man; behold my maleness in all its glory." Rommie hurriedly called Sara over, and the three little pigs cackled in low whispers. "Would you like to take a five minute break, Nathan?" I could only snirk and shake my head. The shame of it all.

But overall, class went well, and I was applauded all around for my drawings in black ink and seina cord, which I considered to be mediocre, but will I ever like my own work? The Lech Jankowski CD went over well, and was asked by both Sara and Nathan, our model, who it was.

When class ended, a naked Nathan approached me and mumbled something that sounded like, "Would you like my number?" I couldn't quite believe that he had said that, and so I said, "What?" He repeated himself. Yes, that is what he had said, but it was still a little mumbled, and soft-spoken, and I really didn't want to be faced with rejecting a naked man, and so I repeated

am feeling quite myself this morning. It seems the illness *was* brought on by the prospect of a visit home, and nothing more.

We now look forward to sleeping in until all hours (today until 11:30), watching movies with Mr. Darcy and Little Miss Moppet (today, the Lord of the Rings Trilogy; the extended versions, all three back to back!), and being generally slothful and decadent (Julian is, at the time of this writing, out buying delicious snacks and drinks - later we'll have a proper dinner of Indian food from across the street.)

Yes, I think that avoiding family holidays are best. Several transcontinental telephone calls will be in order, but nothing more. It is stressful enough for me to visit my family at all, but to add holiday expectations on to this, is all-together all too much.

My toast is ready, and the tea is brewing.

§ December 24, 2004. I cried this evening. I am overwrought with illness and foiled holiday plans. As difficult as my family is, I had wanted to be there for Christmas. I wanted to snirk and laugh at my brother's remarks, I was curious to see my sister-in-law's house, I wanted to meet my niece and nephew. I wanted to see Mother's Christmas tree, to cook her my famous potato-leek soup, to laugh at her silly stories, to help her with her computer problems. I was ready with pen and notebook to faithfully record all glist for the mill. I wanted to listen to Julian's road trip musical program, eat at roadside diners, traipse through Los Angeles, finding inspiration in the decaying city.

Julian has comforted me, and found some old Christmas programs on television for us to watch. Tomorrow I will cook a nice feast of roasted beef, scalloped potatoes, and a large salad. We will visit Mother in early spring, the weather will be better, the holiday stress will be far behind us. The trip will be purified to it's essence, a visit to Mother, without the added distractions of Christmas expectations, and a better chance for success. Perhaps we will be able to take the train down, to rent a car, to do some visiting of our own, to meet Kerry Kate, to visit some shops we've heard about, to drive through Whitley Heights and dream.

§ December 26, 2004. I loathe Bell Market (1336 Post Street, San Francisco), and I don't care who knows! I shall never, ever shop there again. I'm sick of the surly German woman and the lousy desserts in the "bakery", the crappy meats, the bag boys who pack ones produce at the bottom of the bag, then cavalierly toss the canned goods on top. Our Christmas dinner was the last straw! The roast beef was rife with bone, gristle, and fat. The potatoes were hard as rocks, even after having cooked for three hours. We've been trying to save money by shopping at Bell, whose prices are generally lower than Whole Foods, but if most of what is bought is thrown out, then what is the point? I adore cooking, I love to eat, and good food is important to me. Why did I ever think that Bell Market could be a reasonable substitute?

§ December 28, 2004. We've just finished watching a little film that Andrew has sent. It was wonderful! How thrilling to see Andrew making little films - he is obviously very talented. I need some projects, I need to do something. I thank Andrew for his inspiration and creativity. I wonder if I'll be able to afford art school next semester, or should I take a class in Photoshoph, or sewing?

a complete success, and I was absolutely flabbergasted by the art in this film - it was amazing (Amaze *v.* To affect with great wonder; astonish).

Where can I find boots like Violets? How can we Count Olaf-ize our house? Most importantly, will I ever be able to produce art as inspired as that seen in this film? What an inspiration. And now, I must seek out these Lemony Snicket books which I'd never given a second thought. As I am at the library today with Julian, it should not be a problem, though I suppose it's possible that there could be a run on Lemony Snicket books now that the film has opened?

Am I growing old? Have I finally pasted some crucial stage in my development as a human being? For I am so much more open minded than I once was. There was a time when I would have turned my nose up at a "children's film"; I'd have considered myself far too sophisticated, and "cool", to attend such a film. But here I am, intrigued, inspired, *grateful* for such a film, enjoying the child within, giving it free reign to be surprised and delighted by fantasy.

Wasn't it last spring that I read every one of the Beatrix Potter books? I had not read them before! I had seen them, and had been tempted, curious, but kept my distance - I am an adult, after all, and what business has an adult with Beatrix Potter?!

What is happening to me? Am I growing old? Am I in the infancy of my second childhood? Am I losing my mind? Shouldn't I be reading a lot of Pierre Bourdieu? Michele Lamont? Nietzsche? Joining the Communist Party? Volunteering at the Co-op? Marching for peace? What is with this total collapse into the self? Am I making up for an unhappy and lost childhood? Am I finally able to nurture myself? Has Julian lulled me into an infantile state with his lavish and unconditional love?

Carmella has written me a testy email. It seems Guy suddenly wants to travel, and travel without Carmella. This, of course, is our fault, Julian and me, because we encouraged him to do so the other evening while Carmella was chatting up "very important people." Why, I thought, should Guy live under Carmella's thumb? He can travel without her, he should travel without her. She certainly travels without him, to New York, to London, and all while he stays at home and takes care of her cat.

I don't know that she suspects that we put this idea into this head.

Why, oh why, do we have such difficult, disagreeable, tyrannical friends?

§ **December 20, 2004.** In the spirit of the season, allow me to share with you a sad little story, one I loved as a child, which I still love, but makes me still feel like weeping. I present you with *The Fir Tree*, by Hans Christian Andersen.

I am unfortunately cursed with the habit of anthropomorphizing everything, bestowing feelings upon the inanimate, a sad little habit which causes me much daily pain and agony. This morning, for example, I found myself feeling sorry for our little car, imagining it smashed up all to hell in a 60 car pile-up on I5, Julian and I dead inside. You could say I'm having a little pre-holiday anxiety which is manifesting itself as fear, fear of everything.

§ **December 23, 2004.** We are staying home, and what a relief! I took a turn for the worse last night, so didn't at all feel guilty for begging off. Mother was surprisingly accommodating, "I don't want you here if you're sick!", she said. Happily, the crises seems to have passed, and I

myself, "What?" "Never mind," said Nathan, and I walked away from him toward the studio sinks.

§ **December 16, 2004.** We drove grudgingly to Oakland this evening to attend an art opening which included some of Carmella's works. Anticipating heavy traffic, we arose early (10am) to attend to some domestic chores we'd been putting off for much too long, laundry, straightening the rug, dishes, and soup-making. The openings I've attended have always been glamorous affairs, frequented by interesting personalities and flamboyant artsy types, and not wanting to blend in with the fray, we dressed carefully, Julian in his new black suit and I in my black dress trimmed with the wide damask ribbon found at Tail of the Yak.

We're always overdressed, I suppose. We stick out. We're asked if we've been to a graduation ceremony or wedding, if there's an event someplace, or if we're going someplace special. Always, regardless, we reply, "No, there is no special event, we're going to no wedding or ceremony. It is a normal day, filled with normal activities. These are our lives, and we're living them normally." I think of a woman I once interacted with on one of those internet groups, "What a hoot!", she would have said about the hat I wore last night, the one with the ostrich feathers tucked in at the side, the one which gives me a look of Christmas, Vienna, 1920. And later, I was pawed by the homeless who frequent the area around the gallery, "What a great hat! Now give me some money." "Tell me where you all goin'! Where you goin'?" I don't want this kind of attention, but must I approach dress as camouflage in order to keep the unwashed, the curiosity seekers, the nosy, and the rude at bay? Perhaps it was merely the East Bay itself. The residents of Oakland and Berkeley aren't known for their glamour. In fact, I've decided that Berkeley, especially, is the antithesis of what I hold dear.

Carmella, for once, behaved herself - at her opening, at least. She ignored, and left Guy, Julian and me to ourselves, while she chatted up the other artists, and others she'd invited, apparently some very important people. We helped ourselves to free wine and snack crackers. I surreptitiously, and quite unconsciously, destroyed some flower arrangements nearby, well-past their prime, crumbling desiccated petals between my fingers. Guy regaled us with more tales of his beighted past, of which the most dramatic involved two Thorazine suppositories and a Metro restroom. I think we were all relieved when Carmella announced it was time to go to dinner.

I don't recall the name of the restaurant, but it was Indian, and it was on Solano, across the street from the theatre. Carmella, always in charge, always demanding, always high-maintenance, "it's my way, or no way", insisted upon the place. "Alice Waters has eaten here," she said, thinking, erroneously, that this would bestow upon it some sort of mythical aura, endow it with qualities above and beyond mere sustenance. Neither Julian, nor I, were impressed with our 45 minute wait for a table in a drafty vestibule crowded with drab and politically correct Berkeley types, knocking my shoulders, stepping on my Anais Nin shoes, dragging their babies and ethnic, disabled trophy friends around with them - the women with their well-scrubbed faces, dressed in sack-clothe, smug that they've been "liberated" from the gender enslavement of the beauty myth; the men, their beards like unkempt pubic bushes, feeling "aware" and "enlightened", their well-thumbed copies of *Iron John* and *The Kama Sutra* at home in the reproduction Craftsman night table they picked up at Restoration Hardware last year. These Berkeley types, discussing their vacations to Guatemala, and Bangladesh, and the Amazon to live with the "natives" in deluxe "huts". And here they are, eating where Alice Waters ate, shoveling lotus root curry into their pie holes, while the servers

bow and scrape and smile politely at these spoiled modern-day puritans, who in their zeal to embrace multi-culturalism, somehow end up watering everything else down to its lowest common denominator. In the midst of this, we sat, a couple of overdressed, high-mannered freaks, picking at our lousy Chicken Tikka Masala (I don't care what Alice Waters would say.) Carmella picked fights with Guy. Guy shrugged and ate his Tandoori Mahi-Mahi. Julian and I, we could only laugh, finding ourselves in such a place, and *paying* for it. May tomorrow's evenings festivities be better.

I've lost three pounds.

§ December 17, 2004. Kenneth called early this morning to cancel our dinner at Old Krakow. He says he's in a bad mood and is eliminating all his friends, except us, he assures me. Chimes has agreed to a movie tomorrow at Metreon, *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*. "Will I regret this?", I wonder, now that I'm actually faced with the title, typed out in the preceding sentence. It does sound awfully, well, awful. But afterwards we'll set off for Old Krakow, and that counts for something.

Julian has just sent me digital photos from last night's opening. Julian looks great, but Guy looks like a slobbly Jewish psychiatrist, Carmella looks like Woody Allen, and I look most horrible of all, like Brassai's photo, "La Mome Bijou", ridiculous in my hat and jewelry and oversized coat, my still chubby features bleary with make-up. I'm filled with self-loathing. I can't even laugh at my persona. Maybe it is better to camouflage oneself and blend into the background.

But no! I am working on my appearance. I should not get discouraged. I gained a great deal of weight last year from stress. I will proffer a lovelier appearance with time, and I've lost a total of 25 pounds thus far, though it's been slow going, it being the time of year. I am eating well, and exercising, and taking care. And as for my dress? While it's true, I do cultivate a "look", I do love my look, eccentric or not.

On second glance, all is well save my excess adipose, and this will be gone come spring. I suppose it *could* be worse - I could look like that poor Ukrainian bastard, or Rosie O'Donnell.

§ December 18, 2004. Sweating we'd stay home earlier in the day, we later succumbed to temptation and drove out to Celia's last night, a forlorn little Mexican restaurant a stone's throw from the ocean. Celia's has certainly seen better days, the 1970s I should think, although there appears to have been some work done in the '80s, manve leatherette and faux skylights, those cosmetic refurbishments to which all historic and perfect little dining establishments eventually surrender. Celia's is the kind of place which one would call "ironic", and so flock to it if it were ever discovered by the hipsters. We merely find it authentic, and sentimental. Celia's reminds us of childhoods spent in the wastelands of the suburbs - Julian with his family at El Fenix, and me at Don Ramon's with mine - beans and rice and the enchilada platter, a Styrofoam tortilla warmer full of tiny flour tortillas waiting to be buttered and eaten like white bread at supper.

Our drive to the beach was spent looking at city Christmas light displays, trailing down and across fire escapes, awnings, storefronts, and living room windows nine flights up. The bay windows of outlying Victorians were all filled with Christmas trees, blinking soap-bubble colours. Now and then, a house possessed by the Spirit of Christmas, covered in reindeer and wreaths and elaborate light displays, a plastic santa perched precariously on a gabled roof.

There was a time, when I loathed Christmas. I dreaded its arrival each year, and would try to hide, but I was always unsuccessful. Every year, despite my best intentions, I was left feeling spent, and depressed, and empty come New Year's Day. Overwhelmed by holiday crap and high family drama, coupled with rampant and crass commercialism, I was unable to see or feel the essence of the holiday. And so, I struck my head in the sand, grumbled and sneered, and turned my head from Christmas. I could no longer believe that there was anything to love about a holiday run amok. I felt overwhelmed with my own ghosts of distressful Christmas' past.

Little by little, I've salvaged what is worthwhile, and there is much that is worthwhile, but one must look, and look hard! Buried beneath the detritus of tacky Santa Claus wrapping paper, and drunken office party revlers, Macy's holiday sales, and dogs in reindeer antlers, there are the twinkling lights on dark and starry nights, the trees, the haunting music, the Three Kings and their Frankincense and Myrrh, the snow, the feasting, the stockings hung by the fire. There's Charlie Brown's Christmas, The Nightmare Before Christmas, A Christmas Story, Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians, A Christmas Carol (The 1951 version starring Alastair Sim!), Victorian Christmas traditions and vintage Christmas cards and chipped mercury glass ornaments, a roasted Christmas goose, metallic tinsel, those big-ol' fashioned Christmas tree bulbs, flocked trees and aluminum trees and the natural kind that smell good and shed needles and tempt little kitty-cats all over the world. There's the feasting and merrymaking, the candles burning, and Julian and me, warm and snug with the silk curtains pulled tight and the lights down low. I've purged all gift-giving and family drama and American Xmas hype from my life. I've cleared away the memories of the tightly orchestrated Mommie-Dearest Xmas': Mother, glaring, irritable, short-fused, Grandfather shut up in his room reading the bible, waiting for feeding time, Josh, sullen and whiny and argumentative, shooting me dirty looks across the table.

Today was my last class at art school for the semester. I chose to play hooky, as I long ago found anything useful to learn from Sara, and consider getting up at 9 am and sitting in her drawing class a waste of my time. I only regret that I was unable to fill out her evaluation form, which I would have used to tell the Institute a thing or two. Of course, it would have been obvious to all that it was me who'd taken advantage of the situation to go on a trade, and my evaluation, after much tongue-clucking and head-shaking, would have ended up in the garbage. In its stead, I plan on writing Sara an email, which I intend to reproduce here.

Julian bought me the most beautiful little gifts today: two strands of mercury glass beads, in pale shades of pink and green and silver and blue, a little chipped, coated here in there with glitter from Christmas' long past. I put them up on our little aluminum Christmas tree which sits on a table covered in an eggplant coloured, silk velvet remnant. I am happy that these little Christmas strands have come home to live with us, they are fortunate, I feel, to have found such happy, anachronistic home filled with fragments of the past.

§ December 19, 2004. We spent a lovely evening with Chimes last night, who looked quite the gentleman in a grey tie and black raincoat, his unruly red hair combed rakishly to one side. Julian wore his green suit and new "Art Nouveau" tie in brown. I wore my lace up ankle boots with pretty little Scotch leather brushes, black and white striped skirt, and Garbo coat. The Polish food at Old Krakow was a *huge* success (potato dumplings in mushroom sauce!), but most newsworthy, Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events was AWESOME (Awesome *adj.* Inspiring awe or admiration or wonder!) And I rarely use that word, I have you know. But it was

They are the crowd, more or less intelligent, but they are the crowd, and they give me a pain."

———"... Really, when I think it over, literature has only one excuse for existing; it saves the person who makes it from the disgustingness of life."

'And, charitably, it lessens the distress of us few who still love art.' 'Few indeed!' 'And the number keeps diminishing. The new generation no longer interests itself in anything except gambling and jockeys.' 'Yes, you're quite right. The men can't spare from gambling the time to read, so it is only the society women who buy books and pass judgment on them. It is to The Lady, as Schopenhauer called her, to the little goose, as I should characterize her, that we are indebted for these shoals of lukewarm and mucilaginous novels which nowadays get puffed.' 'You think, then, that we are in for a pretty literature. Naturally you can't please women by enunciating vigorous ideas in a crisp style.' 'But,' Durtal went on, after a silence, 'it is perhaps best that the case should be as it is. The rare artists who remain have not business to be thinking about the public. The artist lives and works far from the drawing room, far from the clamour of the little fellows who fix up the custom-made literature. The only legitimate source of vexation to an author is to see his work, when printed, exposed to the contaminating curiosity of the crowd.' 'That is,' said Des Hermies, 'a veritable prostitution. To advertise a thing for sale is to accept the degrading familiarities of the first comer.' 'But, our impenitent pride - and also our need of the miserable souls - make it impossible for us to keep our manuscripts sheltered from the asses. Art ought to be - like one's beloved - out of reach, out of the world. Art and prayer are the only decent ejaculations of the soul. So when one of my books appears, I let go of it with horror. I get as far as possible from the environment in which it may be supposed to circulate. I care very little about a book of mine until years afterward, when it has disappeared from all the shop windows and it is out of print...'"

§ January 12, 2005. There was major drama at work today, but I was away for jury duty, so I missed watching the heads roll - fifteen people, including Sandy Campbell, were laid off, just as I predicted would happen. I've escaped the axe, and I'm lucky, *for now*. Sandy Campbell has more seniority than I do, so I wonder which Gods were smiling upon me? At present I feel extremely agitated, shocked, disturbed that it could so easily have been me. When I think of the aggravation of searching for work, the anxiety associated with it, and the fact that there are so few jobs for librarians at present. Could I find temp work? Could I be hired as a typist? A telemarketer? A data processor? I underestimate my capabilities, but my work and education are so specialized that I couldn't hope to find work doing what it is I do now. I really don't know what would become of me, of us. There would be severance pay, a week for each year worked, but oh! how soon that would disappear! It is so very frightening to contemplate. I wish I were still working my second job, from which I was laid off last year. This, at least, gave me some sense of security at the time, for while it didn't pay so very well, and the hours were limited, I would at least have been assured of paying my portion of the expenses.

Despite the the drama, my fear and apprehension, I hope I will be picked for jury duty. We've been instructed to report back tomorrow at 1:30 for the beginning of the actual jury selection. There were approximately 200 people in the jury assembly room when I arrived at 9:30, and of these, at least half requested to be excused from service! Me, I want to do my civic duty, as much of an inconvenience it is. I will admit that I was rather shocked that so many would try to get out of it - aren't we all busy? Don't we all have better things to do? I simply can't believe that one

of two people would consider themselves worthy of dismissal. On the contrary, I believe that most people are heinously selfish.

I served on a jury once, as an alternate, and it was terribly interesting, just as good as the movies, as old episodes of Perry Mason, as any true crime novel (one of my secret passions!) This case, which is predicted to last 3-4 weeks, we were told is criminal, The People vs. C— C— - what could it be, I wonder? Murder? Arson? Theft? Perhaps all three? It's all so mysterious and exciting!

§ January 15, 2005. I'm sitting at a copper table at Le Bar Absinthe. The idea is right, the decor is right, however, the music is wrong, the prices are too high, and the people are deplorable.

I sit here waiting, it is early, I am waiting for Chimes and his gal Swoozie, who has flown up for the long holiday weekend from Santa Barbara. They begged me to go out with them: they are paying for my nouveau cuisine monstrosity at this over-hyped, oh so trendy (among the well-heeled, moneyed, middle-aged, symphony-going crowd) restaurant.

From the speakers hung in every corner blasts Lena Horne, or is it Julie London? Why not period music? Why not Arside Brant? Or Yvette Guilbert? Or even the ubiquitous Edith Piaf? Anything would be better than swingin' rat pack era buggery that's far, far too loud and bombastic. There is so much that is splendid, and it certainly would enhance the atmosphere, which otherwise is very fine (minus the red-faced lawyers, sweaters thrown round their necks oh so jauntily, their aged wives nipped and tucked and personally trained to perfection.)

I am baffled as to why Chimes and Swoozie were so desperate to have me along. If I were at all paranoid or suspicious, I might think they were up to something nefarious, murder, sacrifice, what with the begging and the pleading and the offers to pay for my meal. But I am only contemplative - why have me along as a third wheel? Isn't this Chimes' big chance to sweep his girl off her feet? He's been trying to entice her to move to San Francisco and share a flat for two. Do they need me, and desperately so, for entertainment? Would they, without me, sit and stare awkwardly at one another? Am I to be the entertainment, singing for my supper? Or does Chimes wish to show his Swoozie that he's well connected socially in San Francisco, that there are nothing but good times awaiting her, palming around with good ol' Lucie and Julian? I have felt nothing but listless and mildly depressed since Julian left for Boston - I dare say they will be let down if they expect more than an attentive listener.

I am a tad concerned about my walk home later - I really cannot afford a taxi, and so will need to take the hated bus if I am to avoid certain innuery, or worse. I should have suggested Da Flora, which would have been so much nicer, in every way - and, I would have been able to walk home without fear, at any hour. But this is not my parade. I am merely a helpless bystander.

I had plans to have breakfast with Carnella today, but canceled last night by telephone. Oddly Carnella wanted to back out as well, so we were both happy and relieved. Carnella and I, we ended up talking for two hours, chatting and laughing like the good ol' days. Sometimes I love her so much. I am beginning to see that with Carnella, my best experiences are when it is just us two, without Julian, without Guy, unencumbered by the expectations and dampening of others.

I've just spied Chimes and Swoozie cross the street, walking in the opposite direction from the restaurant - how typical of Chimes who walks in a world of oblivion. Soon they will realize

their error and be back, which means I must close my journal and put on my happy face.

§ **January 16, 2005.** I awoke early, disturbed by dreams of thrift shops filled with orange and yellow prom dresses, and mutilated bodies - my dreams are always disjointed and meaningless, like a rush of unconnected images, a surrealist film, mostly dark and frightening and disturbing. I prepared a breakfast of crumpets, butter, lemon marmalade and tea, then considered the latest disappointment in my life.

Rejection again. Again I've been rejected, but by someone I'd considered to be a close friend. Now I've been dropped, it appears, snubbed and ignored. It is a frosty and cold, and I've no idea why, what I did, what I said, what I wrote. There must have been something that set Lee's face so, that made Lee's back turn so abruptly, without explanation. But then, as long as I've known Lee, I've sensed Lee found me ridiculous, silly - it's a wonder that Lee ever considered me at all. Lee is a harsh judge and does not, as the saying goes, suffer fools gladly, and I suppose I am a fool in Lee's eyes. For many years, I felt to be tolerated, when contemplated at all, so when Lee finally warmed up to me, I was pleased that I'd finally been deemed worthy of interest, and since it did take so long, since it had merited so much deliberation, I thought Lee serious, loyal, a real friend.

My glee was tempered with caution, my instincts told me that if Lee really *knew* me our friendship would be short-lived - I still perceived that I would be found frivolous, a dilettante, too girly. But what's the point of a dishonest friendship? What's the point of acting a part? I must be myself with everyone, and especially a so-called friend, yet it was apparently this candor, this honesty of thought which caused Lee to regard me a non-entity once more.

This turn of events has contributed to my general sense of malaise, which has only been intensified by the time of year. I loathe January most of all, that dead time between seasons when the world seems to have stopped spinning, leaving a dolorous miasma, a Sargasso Sea of air and feeling and experience, leaving me without energy, without purpose, and at those rare moments when I feign interest in life merely finding fault with all that crosses my path.

And today, I consider too my dreadful evening with Chimes and Swoozie, which did nothing to cheer me. On the contrary, it has left me in an even fouler mood than I was in before. As expected, I was forced to carry the conversation - had I not, we'd have sat and stared at one another all evening, or worse, I'd have been subjected to their prying questions, scrutinized. But this wasn't the worst of it. I've suspected, but now know for sure that Chimes is one of those unfortunate fellows who after a few drinks becomes adversarial and difficult. I cannot abide this sort of behaviour, although I am perfectly able to handle what he dishes out - I only find it offensive and tiresome that he should act so. Too, the two of them, but especially Chimes, are coarse, and rude, and rather undereducated, not in the least discerning in their tastes. They will, for example, in one afternoon, watch the following films: Napoleon Dynamite, The Good Thief, and Chocolat - all bad movies. They know nothing, really; about anything. This leaves me feeling unchallenged, uninterested, and bored, acting the elder, the teacher, showing the naifs how it's done. In turn, I'm left wondering what kind of prat I must seem.

We're ill-matched, and that is all. I should blame neither myself, nor them. I simply have no business acting friendly with those with whom I've nothing to learn. My own company is preferable, no matter how wretched it may be.

§ **January 18, 2005.** The Days have been dull, bloodless and pallid. The sun neither appearing, nor disappearing behind a veil of foul clouds which have the look of a dirty window fogged with fetid breath. It is a yellow, winter sky. There are no shadows, there is no colour. All is wan and cadaverous, without the drama of storms, without the cheerful dreariness of late fall. All is in suspension until the weather turns. We all walk about, like zombies, shuffling over the malodorous sidewalks and gutters, off to our jobs, or our errands, or to nothing at all.

Back in jury duty this morning I find myself mulling over my weekend, which was one of my worst in memory. With Julian gone, and still not returning until Thursday, I am left alone with my thoughts, listless and inert, unable to interest myself in anything. I pick up a book only to read a few sentences, then thrust it away in disgust. I begin a drawing but become bored with my pencils - had I a fire, I would ball it up for kindling. My days are meaningless, meandering from breakfast to dinner, like those of a bored pet whose entire existence is dependant upon mealtime, eating greedily and mechanically. The jury duty, while it takes me from the comfort of bed at too early an hour, at least breaks the monotony of a week spent in isolation, without inspiration, without motivation, without anticipation of anything at all save Julian's return on Thursday.

The judge takes her time grilling potential jurors. More than half consider themselves unfit for service, and yet she seems to think that she can somehow change their feelings and life experience toward this or that, things I should consider to be immediate grounds for dismissal. I do so hope to be chosen for the trial, but suspect I will be excused as most of us will - our pool is made up of 120 persons, after all, and only 16 are needed.

Chimes sent on an email yesterday. I have not yet responded. I prefer to ignore it. He asks me if I wouldn't mind walking home together after jury duty (he is serving as well in another court room.) I did not answer his message filled with exhortation of our mediocre evening out together. I am, in fact, doing just that which Lee has done. I am behaving abominably. I write so much about the rudeness of others, about the mysteries of friendship, about the disappointment of human interaction, and here I am, just as unkind and as malignant as anyone I've derided in this journal.

One can be caught at either end, trapped, not knowing what to do, or snubbed, dropped, frozen out, hurt, confused, angry. It seems as though one's expectations are either too high, or one doesn't meet those expectations.

§ **January 20, 2005.** Charley Charles all decked out to resemble Mr. Rogers: limp brown cardigan, shuffling gait, head bent forward, a crown of neatly clipped grey hair surrounding a pate of pink. Charley Charles, disguised to look like an innocuous old man. I wonder.

Julian returns home this afternoon. I feel much brighter, more optimistic. We've plans to have dinner Friday evening with Kenneth and Philip at Old Krakow, and after a week of middling meals, I look forward to a fine Polish meal. Oddly, I've never looked better, eating this diet of cheap and easy food, no expensive fruits and vegetables from Whole Foods, no glamour-girl mineral water, only a steady diet of tea, English muffins, and the famous marmalade.

Saturday night we're off to the Edwardian Ball. I expect a great deal of standing about (it carries on from 9 to 3 a.m.), but hope it is delightful nonetheless. Overall, I have great expectations, intend to dress well, and paint my face dramatically: big Goreyque circles about my eyes, the jet choker, and my Edwardian tea dress.

Table 5:

Low	High
<i>The Crow</i> , Tim Burton	Leos Carax, David Lynch, <i>Sunset Boulevard</i>
Black Lace, Purple Velvet, Leather, Latex	Black Crocodile Handbags, Vintage '10s & '20s, Portrait & Shawl Collars, Chandelier Earrings, Byzantine Rings, Mongolian Lamb Toques and Coats
Black Lipstick, Heavy Eyeliner & Eyebrows	Shades of Berry, Naturally Pale Skin, Clouds of Perfect Sunset, Vampire
Primary-Coloured Hair, Dreadlocks	Brunette Bobs & Other Gin-Drinkin' Haircuts
Piercings, Tattoos	Unmarried, Naturally Pale Skin, Long, Manicured Nails, Painted & Dark
Florida, The Desert, Tract Homes, Post-WWII Apartment Complexes, Third-World Countries	Farmhouses, Spanish Revival, '20s Art Deco, Paris, Prague, Victorian Town & San Francisco, The Moors, Northern Scotland, Indre-et-Loire
Hearses, Cars with Flames, "Hot-Rods", '59 Coupe de Villes	'50s Mercedes Coupes, Citroën DS
Black Satin and/or Red Velvetreen Interiors	Lined Silk or Damask Drapes, 19th-Century Antiques, Les Puces
Skull, Bat, Spider Jewelry, Tchotchkes, Decor	Prague Art Nouveau, Parisian Beaux-Arts, California Spanish Revival
Sisters of Mercy, Switchblade Symphony, etc.	Hungarian Gypsy Music, Argentine Tangos, Spanish Flamenco, Yann Tiersen, Medieval & Renaissance Dance Music, Marcel Dupré, Lech Jankowski
Role-Playing Games, Gencon, Convergence, Nightclubbing	Lozanging with the Drapes Pulled, Walks Through the Bracken in the Moonlight, Writing, Painting With Oils, Reading Quietly, Meals at Da Flora
Poppy Z. Brite, Anne Rice, etc.	Guy de Maupassant, Edgar Allan Poe, Anaïs Nin, Charlotte & Emily Brontë, Jean Rhys, Lord Byron
"The Munsters", "Bewitched", Elvira	"The Addams' Family", "Histoires des châteaux", "Caméra sans visa", Laurel & Hardy

It is strange how Julian and I have only recently discovered this Edwardian Ball, an event which would have piqued our interest at its inception, five years ago. The ball celebrates the works of Edward Gorey, one of my favorite authors and artists. Guests are encouraged to dress in Edwardian fashion (Edward VII, to be exact), though the fashions of George V's reign, are more in keeping with the Gorey look. The event is as though it were tailor-made for us.

§ **January 21, 2005.** It's the end of the world. It doesn't happen all at once, as some might imagine, rather, it happens slowly, progressively, little by little, accelerating as like a great mass set in motion down a barely perceptible incline, until BAM!, we're annihilated by our own arrogant stupidity, taking every living thing, every trace of civilization with us.

And it's not just us Americans to blame, nor the Western World, for all human beings are, by nature, grasping, selfish, and greedy. We merely got the recipe for disaster right the first time. Now, much of the world follows our example. And those who don't will be force fed our fruits.

On the train this morning a perky woman, looking much like my brother's horrid wife, two large rolling suitcases in tow, stopped to ask me a question in her most smarmy, fakey voice, "Which direction does the train go? I don't want to ride sitting backward?" Her every sentence ending with an upward lilt, as though every statement to pass her lips were a question. I stifled a smirk, "There's a building behind us," referring to the end-of-the-line San Francisco train station directly blocking our path to our rear, "Which direction do *you* think we'll go?" "Why right through the building," she snarmed, a fakey-fake smile plastered all over her prom queen/cheerleader/most popular face, "A simple answer would have sufficed!"; she added, just to let me know she was being sarcastic. She took the row in front of me, taking her cellular telephone out immediately upon jamming her suitcases as to prevent anyone one else from sharing the three empty seats surrounding her.

Overheard conversation by two men on the bus today:

"That boa stained my shirt."

"It was the alcohol seeping through your pores."

§ **January 22, 2005.** We bought this painting today!

And how cute Mr. Darcy looks next to it.

§ **January 23, 2005.** The Edwardian Ball! Where do I begin? What an extremely pleasant surprise!

It has been some years since I've been able to enjoy, fully, the nightclub experience as much as I'd like. There was a time, when everything was fresh and new, when I felt that I was a part of a viable subculture and took particular delight in being around others who felt, dressed, and partook of a lifestyle similar to mine. It as all slightly clandestine and obscure, we were misunderstood, rare, and shunned, and so our affinity and society was welcome and exciting.

But slowly, and then in an onslaught, this subculture was appropriated by the masses, diluted, made ridiculous, nullified. Suddenly, our hairstyles, our manner of dress, our *attitudes* were absorbed into the mainstream by the mob. Our lives as they had been lived lost all mystery

and excitement. We were killed by kindness and acceptance - there was nothing left to rebel against.



And so, these last years I, we, have turned even farther inward, deeper, for inspiration, scraping away at the layers of sediment deposited by years of movie going, and television watching, and radio, and bestsellers, and acquaintances and family, to get at the essential core that is me, us. We've indulged our arcane tastes, our love of early 20th century music, 19th century literature, and etiquette books, Parisian salon and silent film style, Goreyque clothing, hair and make-up, Eastern European foods, darkness and shadow, golden lamp and candle light, the barrel organ echoing through the dank cobblestoned alleys of old Paris, traveling gypsy carnivals, Pavlova and Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes, Alister Crowley, Isadora Duncan, Natasha Rambova, Nazimova, the Marchesa Luisa Casati.

We've eliminated all newspapers, all television (save Turner Classic Movies and the French channel), sold our microwave, given away our 20 cubic foot refrigerator. We've slowly replaced all contemporary furniture with antiques. We eat from beautiful old dishes, drink from antique silvered goblets, use sterling stamped "1906". We spend our days and evenings reading, writing, listening to music on the old gramophone, watching selected films, painting, drawing, or just talking until we're exhausted. We play games like Scrabble and cribbage, or take long walks. We plot our lives, ever diligent in making them more artful, more meaningful, more enjoyable - from the insignificant to the profound.

And while we do make some concessions to the present, our computer for example, we harken back to those times past that we love best, for it is these times that we feel most comfortable in living. We are extremists, it is true, and though not as extreme as messrs. McDermott & McGough, we are viewed by many we interact with through the course of our lives as peculiar. We do not own portable telephones, or those objects used for filing personal information and whatnot. I am always dressed in skirts or dresses. Likewise, Julian always wears a suit and tie. "How can you stand wearing those shoes/a dress/stockings?", they ask. I meanwhile wonder how they can

A little bit clever at communications
 Keep repeating the message, keep repeating the message
 Most people don't.
 As people continue to work
 Revisionist history
 Mutual whining.
 The stuff that we're all grappling with
 To balance all the obligations we have
 The fact of the matter is, I just wanted to put a little code on.

How can you escalate any problems you might have?

Learn counter-procedures
 Make them more contiguous
 That's it for me
 Who cares about the timetables?
 A stable list
 We have the detailed documents
 The by-product
 We are all set.
 An unintended by-product
 Those are the good things
 The issues we have ironed out
 The major objectives.
 Just hanging on there
 This is what we are focusing on
 The bad part is
 That's the way it is.
 We have a prioritized list
 Where we are, we've been communicating
 Lots of activity
 Whatever.
 This is the stuff that's happened
 This has been our opportunity
 There is going to be a lot of activity
 I'm not sure exactly what is being measured.
 They've been having fun with it
 The piece of all of this that has worried us the most
 Trickle out
 The titles are invisible.
 I'm supposed to talk about
 Coded information
 I can't schedule anything without a schedule myself
 I have no date alternative.
 It behooves us to remember, altogether
 To use the new tools
 They need to know ahead of time
 So clever, so far in advance.
 I looked in December
 Who gets to use it
 They don't want to have to roll it out
 They need to know.
 Be prepared

go out look as they do in gym clothes, dungarees, or worse. We both wear hats, use fountain pens, drink strange liqueurs, and wear obscure scents.

And so, knowing ourselves and what we prefer, as well as we do, knowing how impossibly fussy, exacting, cynical, and sophisticated we can be concerning all matters of consequence to us, we had low expectations for the Edwardian Ball. Yet, we were hopeful, for one must always have hope, and we are not so old and jaded as to lock ourselves away permanently - though we are perilously close to doing so. The Ball began at 9 p.m., but we arrived fashionably late to the strains of the 1812 overture booming through the club. I am not so very good at descriptions or retelling events, so I will only say that the rooms of this nightclub were lovingly decorated with figures, decor, and plant life rendered from Edward Gorey books. The walls were bare brick, but there were huge antique mirrors with crusty gold frames. The room was lit by Moorish styled lamps with Venetian glass shades.

Most important were the guests, and they were dressed beautifully, thoughtfully, in everything from authentic Dickensian costume, to boat'd and turbaned '20's femme fatales. I was *dumb struck* by the effort and obvious love and reverence these times past! Prokofiev followed Strauss waltzes. I burst into tears, overcome by the moment, for I have never, since my first forays into rarefied and exclusive groups of counter-culturists, been surrounded with people *just like me* in appearance, and whose appearances were ever so, so much more than mere dress-up. These were people whose interest in a lost world might match mine, our own! Never had I imagined that there would be anyone, let alone an entire room full of like-minded people in San Francisco!

To be part of a group again! And a very well defined group at that. But where do these people go when the club closes? Where do these people hide? Are there other events and gatherings which one might join? I felt so hopeful, so positive thinking over the happy possibilities, but then the inevitable let down as the evening wore on: the club became too crowded, the crowd became too inebriated. We were in turn bored by a red-faced vintage clothing merchant lecturing us on his buying trips to Milan, and appalled by the shenanigans of a drunken Russian girl, her eyes glazed, unfocused, staring. The music lost its charm as the DJ turned up the volume of the amplified Victrola to play selections from the film "Mary Poppins" and "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." "What jiggy-pokery is this?", I asked Julian. We left a little after midnight, unable, unwilling to mash ourselves into the back room to listen to the bands I'd so wanted to hear.

But despite the unraveling of the revelry, I've returned home very happy, very hopeful, and over-all very satisfied - *Il était pas mal du tout*. Over tea and toast we discussed our isolation, and because of it, perhaps, the enhanced joy we felt at discovering the Edwardian Ball: like children let out from an attic of strange toys and the comforts of home, we'd glimpsed the world of the others, dancing and feasting and drinking at candlelit festivities in the ballroom.

We also came up with a brilliant plan: to become DJs who specialize in playing music from the '20s and earlier. I dare say that had we been in charge of the amplified Gramophone last evening, the event would have had quite a different feel! For we are experts when it comes to period music, and I don't mind saying that there is no one in the Bay Area who is as knowledgeable as we! Now, to plot our plan!

§ **January 24, 2005.** The most depressing day of the year, according to Janie Cairns, who sits next to me at jury duty. It's the perfect storm of post-Christmas blahs, poverty, and

crummy weather (says she!) Me, I'm all smiles now that Julian has returned home, that we've made some new friends, and that I'm back on track with my healthy eating routine.

And the new painting! Which is ever so, so delightful! A whimsical kingfisher dressed in a blue velvet frock coat, fitted white duck pants, red cravat, and yellow waist-coat. The painting is inscribed, *"Oùlle Pour Histoire de Famille"*. It is 19th century, it is French, it is perfect. We fell in love with our little kingfisher immediately and had to take him home with us, and so, we resolved to live on a spartan diet of soup and apples for the next month, supplemented by a morning English muffin spread with butter and the famous marmalade. Julian and I, we value art and an artful lifestyle above all, and would gladly live on popcorn or peanut butter and crackers if it meant we could instead live with our Mr. Kingfisher for the rest of our lives.

Jury duty drags on this morning. The judge assures us that this will be the last day of selection - I wonder. So many jurors have been dismissed or excused. Only half of us are left. If this carries on much longer, I fear my number will be up, that I will be called to the jury box to give my particulars and be grilled by judge and lawyers alike - a place I do not relish to be. Oh! the grinding monotony of coming to the courthouse each day, the fear of getting behind in my work nagging at the back of my mind. And then, Kenneth has engaged me to sort through his files so that he might do his taxes on time this year - welcome for the extra money, but mind-numbing.

§ January 27, 2005. On the train this morning, saw a man reading the following book: *Life, Life is a Hymn of Praise to Life!*

Read the following in Hynsman's *En Ménage*: "United by a common hate against the prejudices imposed by middle class, they encouraged each other, disdaining the opinion of the crowd, defying it, accepting failures, very much apart from the world of letters and of painters, regularly criticized unmercifully by all newspapers, by all their colleagues who reproached them their isolation and their uppishness." This quote describes Julian and me perfectly.

§ February 3, 2005. I was stuck in an all day meeting today, where each department manager stood up in turn to talk about all sorts of dull corporate kinds of things. From each presentation I built the following poems, using random phrases. Accompanying each is a small vignette of the muse. I present to you now,

NOT A CHANCE IN HELL, or, Canned Reports If You Know How To Use The Tools.

A lot of back and forth
Get that into place
Understand the connexion
What's on our plate and what's expected.
Fast track this
Your individual plates
We need to reconnect
Think our way through the calendar.
On a pretty fast track
Success criteria for cross management teams
Single thread stuff

A common understanding on an individual level.

A deeper set of understandings

Pertolating into consciousness

There's a way to do business better

Keeping all the stuff going

Create a plan

You have a handout in hand.

Incentated into the program

There are some key elements here

There are two issues - are there any guidelines?

What's dependent on what else

The plan is available to you

Strategic communications.

A person who has a successful career, this is key

Come in with a mandate

So that's what I had to say.

Breaking out these teams

Every single person does the exact same thing

How the road maps fit in

A transition plan.

Major changes that have happened

Throwing hats in different directions

Fully engaged

Putting her plate on someone else's plate.

Worn multiple hats

We're really anxious to get started

We are close to finalizing

Did we really do this right?

A morphing of these teams

The road maps as they are written

Bubble down, way upfront rather than halfway through

Expanded and contracted, expanded and contracted.

Okay...now

Parse out some of the tasks

Repeat these phrases

Is this working?

I need a driver

A lot of things that are right in front of you

Access our needs

What are we striving for?

We're operating in a constrained environment

It gives us an opportunity

To think about what we're doing